

think how you will grieve for all you leave behind

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think how you will grieve for all you leave behind

by [justhockey](#)

Summary

He used to visit his mother all the time when he was in Moscow for the off-season. He'd take bouquets of marigolds and sunflowers, and he'd decorate her grave with them to try and brighten it up. He'd even placed a little solar powered lantern there for nighttime, so she wouldn't feel so frightened of the dark.

It's silly, probably. He knows she isn't really there; knows that nothing is left of her but bones, by now. But still. Ilya had left it there anyway, just in case.

He'll never get to visit his mama's grave again.

Notes

Title from *No Place Like Home* by Cynthia Erivo.

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

It doesn't sink in, not for a while. There's too much going on to even consider it.

When the video gets leaked - when the secret he and Shane had spent over a decade carefully protecting is revealed to the world in the most public of ways - there are a million and one things they have to do. Damage control, and meetings, and meetings, and *meetings*. There are teammates to deal with...friends they had spent so long hiding from. A thousand *urgent* emails sitting ominously in their inboxes.

Then there are the playoffs, and the aftermath, and a dozen other things they have no idea how to deal with but no choice in the matter, either way. They have to face this.

And it's easier with each other to hold onto through the storm, but that doesn't make it simple. It's not. It's complicated in ways they'd never anticipated, and it's painful, and it's revealing, too. They love each other through all of it, of course. Unfailingly. Shane is worth every second of the storm they're caught up in. Ilya wouldn't change one single second that they've loved each other for - wouldn't give it up for anything in the world.

But it's still fucking hard.

And it's only later, in the weeks after the Centaurs are knocked out of the playoffs, that the reality of it all starts to hit.

Ilya can never go home.

He's sitting on the steps of the back porch, watching Anya sniff around the garden while he twirls a cigarette between his fingers. He wants to light it, but he won't. He knows how much Shane hates the smell and taste of smoke, and in a while - once he's feeling a little more grounded - Ilya wants to go back inside and hold his fiancé in his arms.

Right now, though, Ilya just needs a moment to himself.

They'd had such a wonderful evening over at Yuna and David's place, planning last minute bits for their wedding that's only a couple of weeks away.

Ilya loves Shane's parents as if they're his own. He loves them more than anyone in the world, perhaps, except - of course - for their son. They're warm, and comforting, and they have never once treated Ilya like a burden or an imposition. From the moment they watched him reel Shane in from the edges of a panic attack, Ilya has been treated like family.

It's just that - well. Family is a pretty foreign concept for Ilya. At least, the kind of family the Hollander's belong to is. He's not used to such softness. He's not used to blankets draped around his shoulders, and his favourite meal being cooked, and his tears being wiped away with gentle fingers. Or, he hasn't been in a very long time, at least. Not since he was twelve years old.

As he and Shane were leaving, Yuna had folded Ilya into a warm hug and whispered, "Love you, kid," in his ear.

And suddenly, Ilya had been hit with such a profound, intense wave of grief.

He'd been quiet on the drive home, and when Shane had headed upstairs to take a shower, Ilya found himself drifting outside.

The sun is slowly sinking behind the trees that line the back fence of their garden, and the heat is starting to leave the day behind. The slight breeze in the air makes Ilya shiver a little, but he doesn't move to go inside. Not yet.

Yuna's hug had reminded him so much of his mama that it almost stole the breath from his lungs. It's not like she's never hugged him like that before, she does it all the time, but for some reason it had just hit differently today. Maybe it was all the wedding talk - all the planning for something his own mother will never get to see.

She's buried in Russia.

She rests in a plot in Rogozhskoe cemetery, with a large white headstone that has Ilya's crucifix carved onto it. It's beautiful, by all accounts. Grand, and elegant, and fitting for a woman as incredible as his mama was.

Ilya hates it.

He hates it so much that he'd screamed, and cried, and begged them not to lower her into the ground during the burial ceremony. His father and brother had hissed furious reprimands at him, holding him back with bruising fingers on his shoulders and arms. But that hadn't stopped Ilya.

"It's too dark! She doesn't like the dark, she'll be scared. She'll be so cold! Don't put her in there. Please. Please, papa."

No one had listened, of course.

Besides a few disapproving glances - and being scolded for shaming the family name - Ilya's outburst had been entirely ignored.

They'd lowered his kind, sweet, beautiful mother into the cold, wet earth, and it had felt like Ilya was being buried with her. He'd considered it, briefly. Might have jumped down into the hole and begged them to cover him in dirt, too, if it hadn't been for the way Andrei and Grigori had been holding him back.

He used to visit his mother all the time when he was in Moscow for the off-season. He'd take bouquets of marigolds and sunflowers, and he'd decorate her grave with them to try and brighten it up. He'd even placed a little solar powered lantern there for nighttime, so she wouldn't feel so frightened of the dark.

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He'll never get to visit his mama's grave again.

They call it the *Law for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating a Denial of Traditional Family Values*, but everyone knows what it really is. Everyone knows what it means. Ilya is too well known, too much of a public figure, to ever be allowed back into the country. At least not safely.

His extremely public outing - and his steadfast refusal to deny it - means Ilya is officially "*promoting non-traditional sexual relationships*."

He could be fined, or arrested, or worse, if he ever dared to go back there. Maybe he would just disappear entirely. And while his citizenship hasn't been revoked yet, he's pretty sure it's coming.

He's no longer welcome in Russia. His homeland doesn't want him anymore.

He's not quite sure what to do with that. Doesn't know how to name the feeling that twists inside of him, like a tornado that is poised for destruction. It feels a little bit like watching his mama be lowered into the ground. Not quite as earth-shattering, not quite as heavy, but something close to it.

Like watching something that was supposed to be invincible slip through your fingers.

Ilya loves Russia.

He doesn't like it - not the government, or the leaders, or the politics - but he *does* love it. It's his home. Or, it was. It was the place that raised him - the place that made him a man. It gave him courage and confidence, and - most importantly - it gave him hockey.

So, inadvertently, it's also the place that gave him Shane.

He remembers being four years old, his mama on her knees in front of him as she laced up his very first pair of skates.

She'd been a figure skater once, before Grigori stole all the joy from her life. She'd bought Ilya the skates for Christmas, and she was the one who taught him how to use them. It had been January in Moscow so it must have been unbearably cold, but all Ilya remembers is laughing so hard that he slipped and fell onto the ice. His mama pretended to fall, too, just so he wasn't alone. Her nose and cheeks were red.

He and Andrei used to skate together, sometimes, before Ilya got too good and his brother started to fall behind.

Ilya had loved it - loved getting to spend time with his brother, without their dad trying to cause a rift between them. Svetlana would come too, and though her father insisted on figure skates for her - *girls shouldn't play hockey* - she'd skate rings around Andrei and Ilya, battling harder for the puck than any of the boys on Ilya's team.

Russia was where Ilya learned how to love.

His mother, and Svetlana, more than anyone else. His brother and father as well, before he realised it was wasted on people who refused to love him back. He learned to love literature,

and bad American movies, and the unearthly silence after the first heavy snowfall of winter.

It was where he learned how to love hockey, too, of course.

He'd loved hockey *so much* as a boy. His mama could only get him off the ice if she bribed him with medovik or pryaniki. But then - too suddenly and too drastically - it became nothing more than an escape from his sadness and from his father's disappointment. A thing he did because he needed it, instead of wanting it.

Russia shaped him and moulded him. It gave his name, and his skill, and a huge part of his identity. And just because he hasn't been back there since his father died, it doesn't mean he wasn't *ever* going to go back. He would have liked to have the option, at least. To see his home again, and his niece, and the place where he grew up. To see his mama.

He thinks, maybe, it's okay if he grieves it.

He hears the patio door slide open, and Shane's steady footsteps tapping along the deck. He's prepared for questions, but instead a blanket is draped around Ilya's shoulders. It's his favourite; one he brought from Russia, that his mama made for him that last winter before she left.

He doesn't know how Shane knew what Ilya needed, but he's grateful every second of every day to have a partner as wonderfully attentive as Shane is.

Shane lowers himself down to sit on the step beside Ilya.

Anya comes over to investigate Shane's sudden appearance, but after a couple of head scratches she wanders off again, back to her favourite part of the garden: the flower bed. Ilya is growing sunflowers and marigolds.

"It's getting cool," Shane remarks, pressing his shoulder into Ilya's.

"Here," Ilya says, opening up the blanket.

Shane burrows beneath his arm as Ilya wraps the blanket around both of them. Shane's body heat immediately warms him up, and Ilya finds himself sinking into the contact.

They sit in companionable silence for a while, watching as the last rays of sunlight sink down beneath the horizon. Shane lowers his head onto Ilya's shoulder, and Ilya rests his own on top of Shane's.

It's nice, peaceful, which is something they've gotten so little of in the past couple of months. It shouldn't be a surprise, though, because Shane has always been Ilya's calm in the storm. His breath of fresh air when everything else feels like it's suffocating him.

"I love you," he says into the silence.

Shane hums, brushing his nose against Ilya's neck. "I love you, too."

Ilya remembers learning English. His mama was the one to start teaching him. He used to hate it so much, the way his accent was too thick and the way the consonants sounded too harsh. His English was clunky and broken, and Ilya felt embarrassed by it for years after leaving Russia. He still is, sometimes, when he struggles to remember the words for something and Shane isn't around to help.

I love you rolls off his tongue like he was born saying it.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Shane asks, not pushing or pressuring, just offering. An outstretched hand, if Ilya wants to reach for it.

He does.

"I can't go home."

The words hover in the space between them, heavy, and loaded, and so very brittle. Shane takes hold of Ilya's hand and locks their fingers together, resting them on Ilya's knee.

"I know," he says. "I'm so sorry, Ilya."

He shakes his head adamantly. "No. Is not your fault. No sorries from you."

Shane chuckles softly. He takes his head off Ilya's shoulder and turns to look at him, bringing his other hand up to brush the curls out of Ilya's eyes. Shane trails his fingers down the side of his face until he reaches his chin, then he grips it gently.

"I know it's not my fault," he says. "I'm still sorry, though. It isn't fair."

Ilya ducks his head to kiss Shane's thumb, where it's pressing into his chin.

"No. Is not." Ilya sighs. Shane lowers his hand from Ilya's face to his heart. "I will never see my mother's grave again."

A look of complete despair crosses Shane's face, and his eyes fall closed as if he's trying to hold back tears. The expression is so heartbreaking that Ilya can't bear to see it on his fiancé's face. He leans in, kisses him once on each rosy cheek and then twice on his freckled nose.

"I don't regret it - loving you, being out with you. Not for one single second. Please don't doubt that, kótik."

Shane opens his eyes and smiles. "I know. I know that, baby, I promise. I just - I wish it didn't have to be like this."

So does Ilya. He wishes for a lot of things. He wishes his mama was still here, and he wishes his father and brother were different. He wishes Russia could change - could be better - and then maybe one day he could take Shane to visit the place where he grew up. He wishes they got to come out on their own terms, in their own time, without somebody forcing their hand.

But most of all, Ilya just wishes for *this* - Shane in his arms, every single day for the rest of his life.

“I miss her, but. She is not there. Not really.”

Shane gently pats Ilya’s chest, right above his heart. “No. She’s *here*, Ilya. She never left you.”

Ilya lets out a shaky breath, and doesn’t brush away his tears when they start to roll down his cheeks. Instead he leans in again, kissing Shane soft and sweet on his perfect mouth. Shane hums in contentment, and Ilya can feel the vibration of it on his lips. It makes him smile.

“I wish you could have met her.”

“It feels like I already have,” Shane says, “through you.”

He kisses Ilya’s cheeks, licking his lips when Ilya’s tears land on them. It’s intimate, and gentle, and it feels so much like devotion.

“I know Irina was kind, and compassionate, and funny. I know she was brave. I know she was a beautiful skater with a big heart, who loved openly and honestly.”

Ilya has to close his eyes against the flood of emotions.

“I know her, because she passed down all of her best traits to you,” Shane whispers. “And that’s how I know I would have loved her.”

Ilya kisses him. Trembling and clumsy, but so raw - so honest - that it feels like he is being cracked open. Shane is holding Ilya’s heart in the palm of his hand and he’s cradling it so carefully, like it’s the most precious thing in the world to him.

“Thank you,” Ilya says. “Just - thank you. For everything. For sitting here with me. For coming to Ottawa. For marrying me. For *loving* me. All of it, just...thank you.”

Shane looks at Ilya like he’s every single good thing in the world. He brushes Ilya’s cheek with the back of his finger, wiping away the last of his tears before he leans forward and kisses the soft underside of Ilya’s jaw.

“Thank you for letting me. For loving me back.”

“Easiest thing I have ever done,” Ilya tells him, and it’s no word of a lie.

They sit for a while longer, until Anya starts to get restless. She gets up and makes her way inside out of the cold, and it doesn’t seem like such a bad idea. In silent agreement, both of them stand up.

“Come with me,” Shane says, taking Ilya’s hand and pressing a kiss to his knuckles. “I want to show you something.”

“Where are you taking me?”

“I did something after my shower. I want to show you.”

Ilya lets himself be guided through the house, following Shane wherever he is leading them. They flick on lights as they go, illuminating their home is a soft, warm glow. They finally come to a stop in the entryway, and Shane stands back just a little bit so Ilya can see what he's showing him.

They have a wall of photographs in the entrance to their home. There are pictures of the two of them together, and ones with Yuna and David; there are pictures with Hayden and Jackie, with the Centaurs - who have already welcomed Shane into the fold - and of Anya, and from their summer camps.

There'll be pictures of their wedding, soon. The best day of their lives, Ilya knows, even before it has happened.

It's a gallery of memories, and it's beautiful. One of Ilya's favourites parts of the house. Because it's not something he could have even dreamed of just a few years ago - so many people, so much love, that he could fill a whole wall with photographs of it. It's a life he'd once thought impossible but now, thanks to Shane, it's a reality.

He looks at it - every single picture individually - grateful for the reminder Shane is giving him.

He's lost something, yes, and it's okay for him to miss it. It's okay for him to miss what it could have - what it *should have* - been. It's even okay for him to grieve it. But he's gained so much by being here. He's gained so much by loving this man. And it's far more than he ever left behind in Russia - the place that hasn't been a home to him since he was twelve years old.

Ilya has a family here in Ottawa. He has people that he loves and who love him back, without expectations, or conditions, or caveats.

He lets himself lean back against Shane, sighing as his fiancé winds his arms around his waist and rests his chin on Ilya's shoulder.

Ilya looks at the proof of the life they've built together as Shane holds him in his arms, but then...something catches his eye. There's another picture on the wall, a new one that Ilya didn't hang there, and when he looks closer - *oh*.

"Mama." His voice is a cracked whisper.

"She deserves to be up there with the rest of the family, I think. It wasn't complete without her."

It's a photograph from when Ilya was maybe five years old. He's sitting on his mother's lap, leaning back against her as she wraps her arms around him entirely. She's looking at the camera, smiling so brightly it's hard to imagine that she was ever sad. And Ilya...Ilya is just looking up at her like he never wants to look away. Like he never wants her to let him go.

He'd been keeping it in a box in the closet, with a few other memories from Russia. He'd considered finding a frame for it and putting it up somewhere, but he was worried it would

hurt too much having to look at it every day. But as he looks at it now, he knows with sudden, startling clarity, that he doesn't want to hide her away.

He wants to remember her always, even if it hurts. The price of love is grief, after all.

"It's perfect, Shane."

"Yeah?" He asks, hesitantly.

Ilya nods. "Yes. Yes, is exactly what I didn't know I needed. But *you* did. You knew."

"I mean, I like to think I know you pretty well after all these years," Shane says, a hint of teasing in his voice.

Ilya chuckles as he rests his hands on Shane's, where they're wrapped around his waist. Then he says, "You know me better than anyone."

Shane kisses the side of his head, his ear, the sweet spot behind the hinge of his jaw. Ilya melts into his fiancé, letting himself be held and comforted as he looks at the reminders of all he has gained since leaving Russia.

Home, Ilya thinks. Not a place, but a person.

His roots might be in Russia but his heart is here in Ottawa; his heart is here, in *Shane*.

End Notes

ilya rozanov i love u so much

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