

Holiday Mayhem, Featuring Two Idiots in Love

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Holiday Mayhem, Featuring Two Idiots in Love

by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

Hockey boyfriends Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander attempt to buy and decorate a Christmas tree... with predictably chaotic results. Between Ilya's questionable taste, Shane's exasperation, and more kisses than strictly necessary, the holiday season turns into their sweetest, messiest adventure yet.

Chapter 1: 1

Shane Hollander should have been used to the cold by now.

He grew up in Winnipeg, for one thing. He played professional hockey, which meant his workplace was essentially a giant freezer with dasher boards. He'd endured winters that made lesser mortals weep. And yet, somehow, **this** cold—the kind that cut sideways across the street like it had a personal grudge—felt excessive.

He tugged his scarf higher around his face, the wool scratching pleasantly against his chin. Snowflakes clung to his eyelashes. His breath fogged before him in pale clouds. He told himself it wasn't *that* bad.

He told himself that a lot.

It helped distract him from the fact that Ilya Rozanov, walking at his left with his usual loose-limbed swagger, looked completely unfazed by the -10°C windchill biting at their exposed skin.

Show-off.

"Is very romantic, yes?" Ilya said, with the exact tone of someone who knew that yes, it was, and he intended to weaponize the fact for maximum chaos.

Shane kept walking. He would not take the bait. He **would not** combust simply because his boyfriend had decided to turn their tree-purchasing errand into an Olympic-level flirtation event.

"It's freezing," Shane muttered, though even he could hear the fondness bleeding through.

"You are Canadian," Ilya said, scandalized. "Shane, if you tell me you are cold, I lose all respect for you."

"You don't respect me anyway."

"Of course not. But I pretend. For relationship stability." Ilya flicked a snowflake off Shane's hood and smirked. "Also, if your nose keeps getting this red, I might need to warm it."

Shane tugged the hood farther down to hide whatever expression was threatening to take over his face. "We're here to buy a Christmas tree," he said firmly. "Not whatever it is you're planning."

"I can plan many things at once," Ilya said. "Multitasking."

God help him.

The Christmas tree lot came into view—a cluster of green against white, strings of multicolored lights draped above rows of spruce and firs. The smell hit them immediately:

pine and sap and winter air, the kind of scent that settled into clothing and made even the coldest night feel festive.

It was beautiful.

God, it was cheesy and wonderful, and Shane loved it already.

He was glad, not that he'd ever say it out loud, that Ilya had insisted they come out here instead of having a tree delivered. "Is special," he'd said, with that shrug that tried to hide sincerity under lazy arrogance. "First time we get tree together."

So here they were, two overpaid hockey players on a mission to acquire the Perfect First Joint Christmas Tree.

"What kind are we getting?" Shane asked, stopping between two tall firs.

"The big one," Ilya answered immediately.

"How big?"

"Yes."

Shane sighed. "Ilya."

Ilya stopped, scanned the lot with narrowed eyes, and pointed dramatically. "This one."

Shane followed his finger and felt his stomach drop.

"That's twelve feet tall."

"Yes. Beautiful."

"It won't fit in the living room."

"We cut ceiling."

"We are *not* cutting a hole in your ceiling for a Christmas tree."

"Our." Ilya corrected, bumping Shane's shoulder with his own. "Our ceiling."

Shane would have responded, but his brain temporarily shut down because **our** still did things to him. Good, important things. Dangerous things.

He cleared his throat. "Still. It won't fit."

"Fine." Ilya sighed in a way that suggested he was sacrificing something enormous. "We get smaller one. But not tiny. I am not peasant."

"Six feet?"

Ilya made a face like Shane had offered him a week-old tuna sandwich.

“Seven?” Shane tried.

A pause. Consideration. A dramatic exhale.

“Eight.”

“Seven and a half.”

Ilya crossed his arms. “Ilya Rozanov does not do half measures.”

“You measured me against the fridge last week.”

“Totally different.”

They settled on eight, mostly because if Shane didn’t agree, Ilya would absolutely escalate the situation until they went home with a tree that required structural reinforcement.

Shane walked between the rows, trailing gloved fingers over branches. Snow dusted each tree, making them glitter under the string lights. It was peaceful in a way that sank deep into his chest.

He reached one—full, evenly shaped, rich green—and something about it just felt right.

“This one,” he said, softer.

Ilya came up behind him, close enough that Shane felt the heat radiating from him. Even through layers of winter gear, even in subzero wind, Ilya could melt him like nothing else.

Ilya pretended to evaluate the tree with unnecessary seriousness. He circled it like he was scouting a player at tryouts, poking a branch here, squinting there.

“It is adequate,” he finally pronounced.

Shane raised an eyebrow. “Adequate?”

“Good,” Ilya amended. “Very good. Top tier. Elite tree. Will make other trees jealous.”

“That’s more like it.”

Ilya grinned. “But still not as pretty as my boyfriend.”

And there it was.

Heat shot straight to Shane’s ears. His breath caught. He stared down at his boots because if he looked at Ilya right now he’d probably turn into a puddle on the snow.

“Jesus,” he muttered. “Do you ever stop?”

“No,” Ilya said proudly. “Never.”

Shane stepped around the tree, trying to hide his ridiculous smile. “We need to ask someone to net it,” he said. “And then tie it to the car.”

“I tie it,” Ilya said, puffing out his chest as if the act of fastening a tree to a rooftop was an act of masculinity that required special prowess. “I am strong, capable man.”

“You tied your own shoelace to the bench last week.”

“That was tactical error.”

“It took both trainers to untangle you.”

Ilya waved a hand. “Shane. Love. Sweetheart. Beautiful creature. That was sabotage. Someone tampered with lace.”

“Uh-huh.”

“And you—” Ilya stepped closer, lowering his voice in that way that always spelled disaster. “Should show more appreciation. Soon I will wrestle this tree to car with my bare hands. Very impressive. Should get kisses after.”

Shane stared at him. “You’re unbelievable.”

“Thank you.”

“It wasn’t a compliment.”

“It was.”

Shane gave up. It was easier that way.

They found the lot owner—a cheerful older man with a beard that qualified him for mall Santa auditions—and arranged the purchase. The man heaved the tree onto his shoulder and carried it to the netter with practiced ease.

Shane followed, Ilya behind him, occasionally bumping into him on purpose.

“You excited?” Shane asked quietly, watching the tree spin through the netting machine.

“For what?”

“For...you know.” Shane gestured vaguely. “Christmas. Together.”

Ilya went still for a heartbeat. His teasing expression softened into something real—warm enough to rival the lights above them.

“Yes,” he said simply. “Very.”

Shane swallowed around the lump in his throat. He could handle sarcasm, chaos, flirtation, all with some level of composure. But sincerity from Ilya? That was lethal.

The tree emerged fully wrapped, like a gigantic green torpedo. Ilya grabbed it before the lot owner could, ignoring the man's protests.

"I have it," he said, hoisting the thing like it weighed nothing. "Show my boyfriend how strong I am."

The owner chuckled. "He seems like a handful."

"You have no idea," Shane muttered.

They walked to the car—slower than usual because Ilya insisted on carrying the tree single-handedly, balanced on his shoulder like a heroic lumberjack from a romance novel. Shane refused to comment. Out loud.

"You can put it down now," Shane said when they reached the parking lot.

"No."

"Ilya—"

"I am performing masculinity."

"You're going to slip on ice and break your tailbone."

"Is okay, doctors like me. They fix."

"This is ridiculous."

"Shane, take picture."

"I'm not—"

"Take." Ilya carefully shifted the tree to one shoulder, flexed unnecessarily, and posed. "For memories."

Shane gave in and took the photo. His phone immediately fogged from the cold. He didn't care. He'd probably frame the stupid picture later, even if he'd deny it under oath.

After some wrestling—literal wrestling, with Ilya refusing help until the tree nearly rolled off the roof—the two of them managed to secure it. Shane double-checked every knot because he trusted Ilya, but not *roof-hazard-level* Ilya.

Ilya blew into his hands dramatically. "My fingers are frozen. I need warming."

"You're wearing two sets of gloves."

"Yes but they are very emotional fingers. Sensitive."

"Get in the car."

They slid into the vehicle, the heater on full blast. Shane rubbed his hands together, savouring the warmth.

Ilya looked at him sidelong. “You did good.”

“By picking a tree?”

“By coming with me.” Ilya leaned back, stretching long legs forward. “I like doing normal things with you.”

Shane’s chest tightened. He turned the key in the ignition, pretending he wasn’t blushing. “Me too.”

“But next time,” Ilya added thoughtfully, “we get bigger tree.”

“It already barely fits.”

“Bigger.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

Shane sighed. “We’re not cutting a hole in the ceiling.”

Ilya smirked. “Then we get saw.”

“God, why do I date you?”

“Because I am strong, handsome, fun, and kissing champion of North America.”

“No one agreed to that title.”

“You agree,” Ilya said confidently. “Every night.”

Shane sputtered. Ilya looked extremely pleased with himself.

They drove slowly over snow-packed streets, the tree thumping lightly on the roof with each bump. Streetlights reflected off icy drifts. Homes glowed warm through frosted windows. Shane felt something bloom inside him—peace and anticipation and something dangerously close to joy.

He glanced at Ilya.

The Russian winger was tapping his fingers to some imaginary rhythm, humming under his breath, hair dusted with leftover snow. Relaxed. Content.

Beautiful, the traitorous part of Shane’s mind supplied.

“Shane,” Ilya said without looking away from the window. His tone was calm, but there was a thread of nervousness under it that Shane almost missed. “This is...good, yes?”

Shane blinked. “What is?”

“This.” Ilya gestured broadly, as if encompassing the car, the tree, the evening, the entire concept of togetherness. “Us doing...normal things. Boring things. Domestic things.”

Shane’s throat warmed. “It’s perfect.”

Ilya let out a breath that fogged the window and eased back into his seat. “Good,” he murmured. “Because I want many more. Trees. Holidays. Annoying errands. Fights about decorations.”

“We’re not fighting about decorations.”

“I will buy ugly tinsel.”

“You won’t.”

“I will.”

Shane laughed, helpless. “You’re impossible.”

“And you love me.”

Shane didn’t answer.

He didn’t need to.

The warmth in the car—the soft hum of the heater, the glow of passing lights, the quiet comfort between them—said everything.

When they pulled into the driveway of their shared house, Ilya stretched with a groan and clapped his gloves together. “Okay. Now we wrestle tree inside.”

“We’re not wrestling—”

“Shane. Please.” Ilya put a hand dramatically over his heart. “It is tradition. Very romantic.”

“That’s not—”

But Ilya was already outside, arms thrown wide, snow swirling around him like he was summoning it.

Shane stepped out into the cold again. And this time, it didn’t feel too cold at all.

After all, warmth came in many forms.

Sometimes in the shape of a perfect Christmas tree.

Sometimes in the shape of a tall, ridiculous Russian man who flirted like breathing.

And sometimes, warmth was simply the feeling of going home—with him.

Chapter 2: 2

Shane Hollander firmly believed he was a reasonable man. Responsible. Mature. Level-headed.

And yet here he was, at nine in the morning, standing in the seasonal aisle of a massive home-goods store while his boyfriend held a three-foot-tall inflatable reindeer that appeared to be wearing sunglasses and a neon-green Hawaiian shirt.

“This,” Ilya declared, lifting the monstrosity like it was a trophy, “is absolutely essential.”

Shane stared at it. “Essential for... what?”

“For holiday joy.”

“It’s wearing flip-flops.”

“Reindeer go on vacation too, Shane. Do not be judgmental.”

A woman passing by snorted behind her scarf. Shane pretended not to hear it.

“We’re decorating a house,” Shane said patiently. “Not... whatever frat house crime scene that thing came from.”

“Is cute,” Ilya insisted, hugging the inflatable abomination to his chest as if Shane might wrestle it away from him. “He has personality.”

“So does mold. Doesn’t mean we keep it.”

Ilya gasped in offense. “You compare friendly reindeer to mold?”

“I’m just saying—”

“You hurt his feelings.”

“It’s plastic.”

“He feels.”

Shane rubbed a hand down his face. “Ilya, please. Start slow. Maybe let’s pick... I don’t know. A normal wreath?”

Ilya narrowed his eyes, suspicious. “What is your definition of normal?”

Shane approached the shelf of wreaths and pointed to a simple evergreen one—pine cones, small red berries, nothing dramatic. “This,” he said.

Ilya made a face like Shane had offered him boiled cabbage. “No sparkle,” Ilya said.

“It looks elegant.”

“It looks like sadness.”

“It does not.”

“It does,” Ilya insisted. “House looks like funeral home with this.”

Shane opened his mouth to argue but paused. They were barely ten minutes into the outing and already he could feel the rising tension of what would inevitably become a battle of aesthetic values—Shane’s leaning toward cozy and classic, Ilya’s toward glittering chaos.

He took a deep breath.

Compromise. That's what healthy couples did. Even ones containing a Russian hurricane.

“What about this one?” Shane said, reaching for another wreath—still evergreen, but with gold accents interwoven through the branches. Not too flashy, not too plain.

Ilya considered it like a general examining a strategic map.

“Hm,” he said, tapping his chin. “Is acceptable.”

Shane let out a tiny sigh of relief. One item down. A thousand to go.

They made their way deeper into the store, the shelves growing more overwhelming by the aisle. Inflatable Santas, twinkling lights, snowmen of every size, an alarming variety of nutcrackers—some charming, some distinctly nightmarish.

Shane drifted toward the tasteful ornaments, while Ilya immediately pounced on the tackiest selection like a magpie possessed.

“Shane,” Ilya called, waving something in the air. “Look.”

Shane looked. Then immediately wished he hadn’t. It was a garland. Shiny metallic tinsel... with miniature disco balls attached. Tiny, glittering disco balls.

“Oh no,” Shane whispered.

“Oh YES.” Ilya grinned wildly. “This will bring glamour to our life.”

“Our tree is not becoming a nightclub.”

“Why not?” Ilya asked. “Our house can be sexy winter disco palace.”

Shane opened his mouth to respond, shut it again, then pinched the bridge of his nose. “Ilya. We agreed on something festive. Cozy.”

“This is cozy,” Ilya lied boldly. “Look, it sparkles warmly.”

“It sparkles like a migraine.”

Ilya placed a hand over his heart. “You wound me.”

“I’m not buying disco tinsel.”

Ilya flopped dramatically against him—half draping, half leaning—like a man whose spirit had been crushed by the cruel, joyless world. “Shane is tinsel hater,” he declared, not quietly.

A kid in the aisle giggled. Shane felt heat climb his neck.

“I’m not a tinsel hater. I’m a *good-taste* enthusiast.”

“That is same thing.”

Shane nudged him upright. “We’re not getting it.”

But Ilya, menace that he was, simply tossed the garland into their cart when Shane wasn’t looking.

Shane discovered it two aisles later.

“Ilya.”

“Yes?”

“We talked about this.”

“You are hallucinating. I don’t know how it got there.”

Shane reached in. “I’m putting it back.”

“No, no—wait—look—“ Ilya snatched a different garland from the shelf. Red and gold, understated, actually quite nice. “If we get this one, you allow disco tinsel for one room. Tiny room. Very tiny.”

Shane eyed him. “Which room?”

“Laundry room.”

“We don’t need tinsel in the laundry room.”

“But imagine folding clothes in sparkly joy.”

Shane hesitated. Mostly because picturing Ilya doing laundry in a room decorated like a Vegas fever dream was both absurd and weirdly endearing.

“...Fine,” Shane said at last.

“YES.” Ilya fist-pumped like he’d scored a shorthanded goal.

Shane shook his head—but he was smiling.

In the ornament aisle, things improved. Somewhat. Shane picked classic glass balls in red, gold, and green. Ilya didn't fight him on those.

But then Ilya found the novelty section. "Oh my God," he said reverently, holding up an ornament shaped like a pickle wearing skates.

Shane blinked. "Why would anyone make that?"

"Why would they NOT?" Ilya countered. "It is pickle with hockey theme. It is destiny."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Yes."

"Absolutely not."

Ilya slowly, deliberately, placed it into the cart.

Shane stared at it. "You're not serious."

"I am always serious. I am extremely serious man."

Shane looked at him.

Ilya cracked instantly. "Okay, not serious. But pickle stays."

"What even is your attachment to that thing?"

"I don't know. But I feel connection. Spiritual."

Shane sighed dramatically, because someone had to keep this emotional rollercoaster grounded. "One weird ornament," he said. "Only one."

Ilya nodded with suspicious eagerness. "Of course. One weird ornament."

Three minutes later, the cart had acquired: a wooden moose wearing a scarf, a penguin with sunglasses, a flamingo in a Santa hat and a small plush dinosaur holding a candy cane

Shane held one up. "Ilya."

"You said one weird ornament," Ilya said, unremorseful. "These are adorable. Not weird."

"They're deeply weird."

"You are deeply weird and I love you. So now you must love these."

Shane choked on air.

Ilya blinked at him innocently. “What? Is logical argument.”

“Put at least two back.”

“No.”

“Ilya.”

“Fine,” he huffed, selecting the penguin and flamingo. “But moose stays.”

“And the dinosaur?”

“YES. Look at him. He is baby.”

Shane didn’t know when he’d lost control of his life, but it was definitely before the dinosaur ornament appeared.

Lights were easier. Mostly because Shane had pre-researched LEDs like the meticulous planner he was, and Ilya trusted him on anything that involved electricity and the possibility of electrocution.

“We need warm white,” Shane said. “Not the cold blue ones.”

“Agree,” Ilya said. “Blue ones make house look haunted.”

“And maybe a set of colored ones to put on the balcony rail?”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “And maybe flashing ones for—”

“No flashing ones.”

“But—”

“No.”

“But it is fun.”

“It gives people seizures.”

“Only if they are weak.”

Shane gave him a look.

Ilya sighed. “Fine. No flashing.”

They added lights to the cart. Then extension cords. Then hooks. Then two extra boxes of lights because—according to Ilya—“you can never have too many.”

Shane suspected this was foreshadowing.

The last aisle was where their worlds collided: tabletop decorations.

Shane found a small carved wooden nativity scene—tasteful, traditional—and placed it into the cart.

Ilya picked up a plush Santa that, when squeezed, burst into a chaotic jingle-bell remix that sounded like someone had let a rave loose inside a snow globe.

Shane flinched. “Absolutely not.”

Ilya squeezed it again.

“Stop,” Shane said, pained.

“One time more,” Ilya said.

“No—”

It jingled. A toddler pointed and shrieked with glee. Ilya beamed, vindicated.

Shane leaned close, voice low. “If you buy that, I will hide it so well you’ll never see it again.”

Ilya considered. Long and hard. Then placed the Santa back with a sigh. “Okay. For relationship stability.”

Shane snorted.

But then Ilya picked up a ceramic snowman—chubby, smiling, wearing a green scarf—and held it out. “This one,” he said, quieter than before. “Is good.”

It was. It was honestly cute. Simple. Cheerful.

Shane smiled. “Yeah. That one’s perfect.”

Ilya looked pleased in a way that did unfamiliar, melting things to Shane’s insides.

Checkout was... an adventure.

The cashier eyed their collection—a blend of classic elegance, childlike chaos, and outright questionable items—and raised a polite, judgment-free (but definitely amused) eyebrow.

“Big decorating day?” she asked.

“Yes,” Shane said.

“BIG day,” Ilya corrected. “Very important. Very... festive.”

The inflatable Hawaiian reindeer, which they were somehow still buying, beeped across the scanner.

Shane closed his eyes briefly.

Ilya patted his arm. “He will grow on you.”

“He better not.”

On the drive home, the car full of bags, Shane finally felt the tension ease out of him.

Ilya had one boot propped on the dashboard—because he was lawless—and was examining the dinosaur ornament like it held deep life secrets.

“Today was good,” Ilya said suddenly.

Shane glanced over. “Yeah. It was.”

“I thought you would yell at me more.”

“You tried,” Shane said dryly. “Very hard.”

“I am talented,” Ilya agreed.

“But it was fun,” Shane admitted. “Messy. Ridiculous. But fun.”

Ilya leaned back, arms folded behind his head, satisfied. “We make good team.”

Shane hesitated. Just a beat. But enough for the thought to settle: *yeah, they really did.*

“Yeah,” he said softly. “We do.”

Outside the window, snow drifted lazily across the street, flakes catching the winter light. Their house—their house—waited at the end of the block, quiet and warm.

Shane felt it then. The rare, full feeling of exactly where he was supposed to be.

Ilya tapped the dinosaur ornament against his knee. “Tomorrow we decorate?”

Shane groaned. “Oh God.”

Ilya grinned. “Shane. Sweetheart. Beautiful creature. You cannot escape festive destiny.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Fine. Tomorrow.”

“Yes.” Ilya pumped a fist triumphantly. “Christmas chaos continues.”

Shane laughed—quiet, helpless, happy.

Yeah. It did.

And honestly... he couldn't wait.

Chapter 3: 3

Shane Hollander prided himself on being disciplined.

He stuck to schedules. He liked order. He believed in completing tasks in a timely, efficient, non-chaotic manner.

Unfortunately, he lived with Ilya Rozanov.

Which meant that on the day they planned to decorate the house for Christmas—something Shane had actually been looking forward to—he found himself standing in the middle of their living room, surrounded by half-opened boxes, tangled lights, glitter somehow already in his hair, and a boyfriend who had decided that productivity was optional but kissing was apparently mandatory.

“We have to sort the ornaments first,” Shane said, kneeling beside a box and carefully unwrapping a red and gold bauble.

“Yes, yes,” Ilya said, leaning over him. Too close. Always too close. “We sort, then hang, then admire, then kiss.”

“We don’t need a kissing step.”

“Yes we do. Is best part.”

Shane carefully set the ornament aside. “You added that step.”

“Of course. I am man of romance.”

Shane snorted. “You’re a menace.”

“I can be both.”

Shane opened another box. Immediately, a tinsel explosion puffed out like glitter confetti.

He glared. “Why does this look like a disco ball exploded?”

Ilya grinned, unrepentant. “Laundry room décor. Very classy.”

“You’re not putting that in the laundry room.”

“I am. People will weep at beauty.”

“No one’s weeping—hey!” Shane jerked back as Ilya leaned down and kissed his cheek.

“We’re working.”

“I am multitasking.” Ilya kissed the other cheek. “See? So good.”

Shane pushed him lightly. “Stop. We have a whole house to do.”

“I help,” Ilya said, grabbing a handful of ornaments. Then—unhelpfully—he grabbed Shane’s waist too and pulled him in for a kiss.

Shane didn’t expect it. He never did. One second he was mid-sentence; the next his breath hitched, and Ilya’s mouth was on his, warm and soft and entirely too much for someone trying to be productive.

Shane pushed him away only when his brain started melting. “You can’t just—interrupt—like that.”

“I can,” Ilya said cheerfully. “I am excellent at interrupting.”

Shane’s head dropped forward with a groan. “We’re never finishing.”

“We will,” Ilya said confidently. “Eventually. Maybe in four hours. Maybe in ten. Who knows.”

“We’re finishing today,” Shane insisted.

“Yes,” Ilya agreed. “Today. But also kissing.”

Shane glared, but his ears were already betraying him by turning red. “Get the tree lights. They’re in that box.”

Ilya saluted dramatically and headed off. Shane watched him go, muttering, “I swear, one of these days...”

But he was smiling. Tiny, involuntary, impossible-to-smother smiling.

The tree stood in the corner, still smelling faintly of the netting from the lot, dark green branches full and perfect. It took up more space than Shane expected, but less than whatever unreasonable giant Ilya had wanted.

Shane held a string of warm white lights. “Okay. We start at the bottom and work up. Not too tight, not too loose.”

“Like wrapping you in blanket burrito,” Ilya said thoughtfully. “But tree version.”

“That is not—no. Just... follow my lead.”

Ilya nodded solemnly, the picture of faux seriousness. For approximately seven seconds. Then, as they circled the tree, wrapping the lights around, Ilya suddenly stepped in front of Shane, blocking his path.

Shane stopped. “You’re in the way.”

“Yes,” Ilya said, stepping closer.

Shane raised a brow. “Are you planning something?”

“No.”

Ilya kissed him.

Shane nearly dropped the lights.

“Ilya!”

“Shane,” Ilya mimicked innocently. “Why so surprised? It is holiday spirit.”

“You can’t keep interrupting.”

“I can,” Ilya said. “Tree looks better with love.”

“This isn’t love, it’s sabotage.”

“Same thing.”

Shane narrowed his eyes. “Move. Or I’m finishing the top half alone.”

“No,” Ilya said, affronted. “We do tree together. Very symbolic. Very meaningful.”

“Then stop stealing kisses every five seconds.”

“Impossible.” Ilya leaned in again.

Shane dodged him. “No.”

Ilya blinked. “Did you just avoid me?”

“Yes. Because I want to finish the lights.”

Ilya gasped dramatically. “You choose TASK over KISS?”

“For five minutes, yes.”

Ilya clutched his chest as if wounded. “Unbelievable. I am dating robot.”

“You knew that going in.”

Ilya grumbled in Russian under his breath, untangling another light strand with theatrical misery.

But he actually behaved—briefly—and together they wrapped the entire tree, stepping back to admire the soft white glow filling the living room.

“It looks good,” Shane said.

“It looks amazing,” Ilya corrected. “And now we must celebrate.”

“With...?”

“Kiss,” Ilya said, immediately moving toward him.

Shane dodged again.

Ilya sputtered. “You are getting very fast. I don’t like it.”

“Or you could just wait until we’re done.”

“I hate waiting.”

Shane smirked. “I noticed.”

Shane opened their ornament box—half classic, half crimes against good taste. He lifted a delicate glass orb. “Start with the nice ones.”

“Boring ones, you mean.”

“Ilya.”

“Fine. We do one nice ornament, then one beautiful weird ornament.”

“That is not—” But Ilya had already placed the skate-wearing pickle in a prime front-and-center location.

Shane stared. “You did not just put that in the middle of the tree.”

“Of course I did. It is star of show.”

“It’s a pickle.”

“It is elite pickle.”

Shane sighed. “Move it to the back.”

“No.”

“Ilya.”

Ilya crossed his arms. “If pickle goes in back, you go in back too.”

“What does that even—”

“I mean corner of room. You sit in corner and think about how mean you are.”

Shane barked a laugh. “I’m not going to pickle-jail.”

“Then let pickle stay.”

Shane shook his head. “Fine. But it’s going lower down.”

“Middle.”

“Lower middle.”

Ilya considered this with dramatic gravity. “Lower middle,” he agreed. “Compromise.”

This felt like negotiating a treaty. They worked in relative peace—if “peace” meant Ilya narrating everything as if filming a documentary and Shane smiling despite himself.

Then it happened.

Shane was hanging a gold ornament when arms slid around his waist from behind. Warm, solid. A chin dropped onto his shoulder.

“What now?” Shane asked, not as annoyed as he tried to be.

“Tree decorating position is very good for kissing,” Ilya observed.

“We’re working.”

“Kiss is part of work.”

“No, it’s not—”

Ilya turned his head and pressed a slow, soft kiss just under Shane’s ear.

Shane froze.

His breathing caught. Heat shot down his spine like electricity. He gripped the branch in front of him a little too tightly.

“That’s cheating,” he whispered.

“Yes,” Ilya agreed happily. “I am winning.”

Shane cleared his throat. “Let go.”

“No.”

“We need to hang ornaments.”

“We hang later.”

“Ilya—”

Another kiss, lower this time.

Shane nearly dropped the ornament.

“I swear,” Shane muttered, “you’re impossible.”

“You love impossible. Is your type.”

Shane didn’t answer. He couldn’t—not while his brain was short-circuiting and Ilya’s mouth was doing that.

He managed to twist away only by sheer force of will. “No more until we finish,” Shane said breathlessly.

Ilya smirked. “Your ears are red.”

“They’re cold.”

“They are not cold,” Ilya said, stepping forward again.

“Stop.”

Ilya grinned but backed off—with the exact expression of a man planning seventeen more ambushes.

The last steps were simple: garlands on the banister, candles on the mantel, the snowman figure Ilya chose placed on the table by the window.

Shane straightened the table runner. “Okay. Almost done.”

Ilya appeared behind him like a predator sensing weakness.

Shane pointed at him. “Don’t even think about it.”

“I am not thinking,” Ilya said, stepping closer. “I am doing.”

“Ilya—”

Kiss.

This one landed right on Shane’s mouth—quick but deliberate.

Shane blinked, stunned. “You have no patience.”

“No,” Ilya agreed. “None at all.”

Shane exhaled a laugh, trying and failing to look annoyed. “You’re impossible.”

“You said that already. But now you say it with smile.”

Shane fought to wipe the smile off his face. “I’m trying to be productive.”

“And I am trying to be romantic. We both work very hard.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Come help me put the star on the tree.”

Ilya’s eyes lit up. “Yes. Star is very important. Symbolic. Magical. Romantic.”

Shane narrowed his eyes. “If you try to kiss me when I’m on the step stool—”

“I would never sabotage you while you balance,” Ilya said solemnly.

Shane relaxed a fraction.

Then Ilya added, “I wait until you come down.”

Shane groaned. “Of course.”

But he climbed the stool anyway, star in hand. Ilya spotted him from below, hands lightly at Shane’s waist—steady, careful, uncharacteristically gentle.

Shane placed the star.

They both stepped back to look.

It was... perfect.

Warm lights. Beautiful ornaments. A star that glowed softly. A room transformed into something cozy and bright and unmistakably theirs—equal parts elegant and chaotic.

Shane exhaled, soft. “It looks really good.”

Ilya nodded, but his gaze wasn’t on the tree. It was on him. Shane felt it, like heat through layers of winter clothing. “What?” he asked, suddenly shy.

“I like this,” Ilya said quietly. “Us doing all this. Making house our home.”

That did something warm and dangerous to Shane’s heart. Before he could answer, Ilya stepped forward and kissed him. No ambush. No teasing. Just slow, warm, sincere.

Shane melted. He kissed back.

When they finally broke apart, Shane whispered, “Okay. That one was allowed.”

Ilya smirked. “Good. Because I have many more.”

Shane rolled his eyes, but he was smiling like an idiot. “We finished everything. You can kiss me all you want now.”

“Perfect,” Ilya said, immediately pulling him in again.

And Shane let him.

Because for all his pretending, for all his mock annoyance, he wouldn’t have traded a second of this chaos—not the tinsel, not the weird ornaments, not even the pickle.

Especially not the kisses.

The house glowed around them, warm and bright.

And so did they.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

If you'd like more chapters centered around the holiday spirit, just let me know and I'll see what I can do ;)

Ilya Rozanov decided, somewhere between chopping vegetables and watching Shane scold a sauté pan, that he was going to remember this night for the rest of his life.

Not because anything dramatic was happening. Not because they were at a game or a gala or doing something that would end up on social media.

But because the house—their house—glowed with the warm lights they'd hung all afternoon. The tree sparkled softly in the corner, the stupid-but-beautiful ornaments catching the light. The air smelled like garlic and herbs and winter outside the windows.

And because Shane Hollander was standing right there, focused and frowning at the stove like it had personally wronged him.

Ilya smiled, leaning against the counter, elbows behind him. “You look very serious.”

“I’m cooking,” Shane said, poking at the pan with the concentration of a man defusing a bomb. “If I get distracted, this burns.”

“Is pepper,” Ilya said. “Hard to burn.”

“You *would* say that,” Shane muttered, but his lips twitched.

They’d agreed on something healthy. Only Shane Hollander could be in full Christmas spirit and still insist on lean protein and vegetables.

To be fair—it smelled amazing.

“What do I do?” Ilya asked, watching the neat pile of chopped vegetables he’d already finished.

Shane pointed with the spatula. “Can you get the chicken out of the fridge? And the marinade. They need to go in the pan next.”

Ilya strutted to the fridge and returned with both items, dramatically presenting them like precious gifts.

Shane laughed. “You’re such a clown.”

“Is charm,” Ilya corrected, leaning over to brush his shoulder against Shane’s. “You are lucky to have me.”

“Yes,” Shane said dryly. “So lucky.”

But when Ilya leaned in to kiss his temple, Shane didn’t pull away.

He tilted his head just slightly—enough to show he liked it.

Enough to make warmth bloom through Ilya’s chest.

He placed the chicken into the pan, stepping aside so Ilya could stir. Together they moved naturally—passing utensils, reaching around each other, bumping hips, sharing tiny touches that felt louder than they were.

Soft domestic choreography.

Ilya kept brushing against him—light fingers at Shane’s wrist, a hand at his waist as he reached the spice rack, a small kiss dropped to the side of his jaw because he passed too close not to.

Shane pretended to be annoyed every time. But his cheeks pinked, and his eyes softened, and the small smirk he tried to hide kept returning.

“You keep doing that,” Shane warned, “and we’re never going to finish dinner.”

“I can multitask,” Ilya said, nuzzling his cheek and then returning to stirring. “See? Very talented.”

Shane shook his head. “You’re impossible.”

“But you love impossible.”

Shane didn’t deny it.

When the chicken finished cooking, Shane plated the meal—brown rice, sautéed vegetables, perfectly seasoned chicken. Colorful, healthy, very Shane.

They carried the plates to the table by the window where the new snowman figurine sat proudly. Ilya had named it Boris.

Shane pretended he hadn’t.

It was peaceful, eating together as the snow began falling outside. The kind of slow, drifting snow that looked almost shy.

Shane ate with a small contented sigh. “This is good.”

“I made it good,” Ilya said immediately.

Shane rolled his eyes. “You did one third of the work.”

“I did most important third.”

“Which is...?”

Ilya pointed at himself. “Being handsome in kitchen.”

Shane almost spat his water. “Oh my god.”

“It improves flavor.”

Shane leaned back in his chair and just looked at him—long, warm, soft in a way that made Ilya feel like his heart was cracking open in the best way.

“I do like cooking with you,” Shane said quietly.

Ilya froze. Not at the words—he knew Shane enjoyed it. They’d cooked together many times.

But the *tone*. Tender, unguarded, not wrapped in humor or annoyance or pretend-distraction.

It was the tone Shane used only with him, only when he wasn’t thinking too hard.

Something in Ilya went warm and soft, like heat blooming under his ribs. “Good,” Ilya murmured. “Because I like cooking with you.”

He didn’t say more. Didn’t tease. Didn’t push.

Just let the moment sit between them—comfortable and honest.

When they finished eating, they cleaned up together, bumping hips and exchanging quiet laughter, until the kitchen was spotless again.

Shane dried his hands on a towel. “Couch?”

“Yes,” Ilya said immediately. “Couch.”

The couch was positioned perfectly so they could see the tree glowing softly beside them. Warm white lights reflected in Ilya’s eyes as Shane curled beside him—head on his shoulder, hand resting lightly on his chest.

Ilya wrapped an arm around him, pulling him closer, pressing a slow kiss to the top of his hair.

Shane relaxed instantly.

That was the best part—how easy it was. How *right*. No pretending to be tough or annoyed or unaffected. Just warmth pressed into him, Shane fitting against his side like he’d been made for it.

“You tired?” Ilya murmured.

“A little,” Shane admitted. “But in a good way.”

Ilya hummed softly and brushed his knuckles along Shane's arm—light, slow, barely-there touches. Shane shivered at the contact, even though the room was warm.

Ilya loved that. Loved how sensitive Shane was to even the smallest touch. Loved how he leaned in without thinking.

“Cold?” Ilya asked.

Shane blinked open one eye. “No. Just... you're doing that thing.”

“What thing?”

“That thing,” Shane said, scowling half-heartedly. “The soft touch thing that makes me melt.”

Ilya smirked. “Good. I like when you melt.”

Shane huffed. “You can't just—say things like that.”

“I can,” Ilya said simply. “Truth is truth.”

Shane buried his face in Ilya's sweater to hide whatever embarrassing expression was happening on his face.

Ilya held him closer.

Minutes passed like that—couch warm, tree twinkling, snow falling outside.

Ilya could have stayed there forever.

Eventually Shane shifted, slightly embarrassed. “We should probably get ready for bed.”

“Probably,” Ilya echoed.

Neither of them moved.

They eventually made it to the bedroom after brushing teeth side by side and teasing each other over whose hair was messier (Ilya's, obviously, though he argued otherwise).

Shane climbed into bed wearing soft gray sleep pants and a long-sleeve shirt.

Ilya climbed in behind him.

Shane rolled onto his side automatically, offering his back in that quiet, trusting way that made Ilya's chest tighten. Ilya slid closer—one arm around Shane's waist, one hand resting at the warm spot just above his hip.

Shane breathed out slowly. Soft. Relaxed. Home.

Ilya pressed a kiss to the back of Shane's neck. Light. Barely a brush.

Shane inhaled sharply. “Okay,” he whispered. “That's not fair.”

“Why not?” Ilya murmured against his skin.

“Because it—” Shane swallowed. “It feels too good.”

Ilya smiled into his neck. “Good.”

His hand slid slowly along Shane’s waist, fingers tracing gentle lines under the hem of his shirt. Not rushed. Not demanding. Just exploring, just touching, just loving.

Shane shivered.

“Turn,” Ilya whispered.

Shane obeyed—shy but willing, cheeks slightly pink even in the dim light.

Ilya cupped his jaw softly. “Beautiful,” he murmured, brushing a thumb over Shane’s cheekbone.

Shane’s breath trembled.

“Ilya...”

“Quiet,” Ilya said gently. “Just feel.”

He leaned in.

The kiss was slow. Careful. Deep in a way that wasn’t about intensity but intention.

Shane’s hand slid up Ilya’s chest, fingers curling into the fabric of his shirt. Not pulling, just holding on.

Ilya kissed him again—mouth warm, movements soft, lips brushing along Shane’s like a promise.

Shane melted completely this time.

When they broke apart, Shane pressed his forehead to Ilya’s, breathing him in.

“You always do this,” Shane whispered. “Make everything feel...”

“Good?”

“Safe,” Shane corrected softly. “Safe and warm and too much at the same time.”

Ilya swallowed the sudden ache in his chest. “I want to make you feel that. Always.”

Shane leaned forward and kissed him again—lighter this time, tender in a way he rarely allowed himself to show.

Their touches grew slower, warmer, more deliberate. Fingers tracing skin. Foreheads pressed together. Kisses growing deeper, breathier, lingering.

Not rushed.

Just closeness. Warmth. Skin against skin. Bodies fitting together under soft sheets. Whispered laughter. Quiet breaths.

A night made of heat and tenderness and the kind of intimacy that wasn't about urgency but about choosing each other, over and over again.

When they finally settled, Shane curled against Ilya's chest, one hand on his heartbeat.

Ilya wrapped him close.

Shane whispered, barely audible, "I love you."

Ilya closed his eyes.

Everything inside him went soft. Warm. Infinite.

"I love you too," he murmured into Shane's hair.

Snow fell outside. The Christmas lights glowed softly through the doorway. The house felt alive with their touch.

And wrapped together, warm and safe, they drifted into sleep.

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