

where the heart is

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where the heart is

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Summary

Ilya's first Christmas at home

Yuna smiles at him, the corners of her mouth tightening with some emotion he can't fully understand. "We just wanted you to feel at home."

Ilya looks down. His nose burns, the ribbons wrapped around the green paper swimming together in a red haze as his eyes inexplicably fill with tears. Squeezing the box so hard the paper wrinkles, tearing at the top where his thumb presses against it, he takes a deep breath, trying to find the words to explain how he wouldn't know what that felt like. Not before Shane anyway.

Notes

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

“You coming?”

Ilya’s eyes snap to Shane from where they’ve been fixed on Yuna and David’s front door. Even from here he can make out the bold *Merry Christmas* across the large wreath hanging under a string of colored lights.

It’s Christmas Eve, his first one spent away from Boston. His first with Shane. The first without that bone deep sense of loneliness that usually accompanies it.

Maybe it’s the lack of hours of sleep from his early morning flight, hours he certainly hadn’t caught up on after he had his boyfriend in his arms, or maybe it’s the strange warmth in his chest at the sight of the Christmas lights over the Hollanders’ front door. He isn’t sure. Whatever the feeling is that prompts his honesty, the words come tumbling out of his mouth without a second thought.

“I feel... nervous. I think.”

Shane backtracks from where he’s halfway up the steps, his arms sliding around Ilya’s waist as he seals their mouths together. Ilya sinks into the kiss without thinking, making no move to deepen it, just enjoying the warmth of Shane’s mouth against his, the pressure calming the flutter of inexplicable nerves in his stomach.

He’s played in the highest pressure games of his life without a flicker of hesitation, not an ounce of intimidation or fear, but now he’s too nervous to even walk through his boyfriend’s parents’ front door. He doesn’t know what the hell is his problem, but Shane seems to understand it for him.

“They’re nervous too, you know,” Shane whispers, drifting a trail of kisses from Ilya’s mouth to the curve of his neck, the rest of his words puffing in short bursts against the shell of his ear. “They know how much you mean to me, so this means a lot to them too.” As he whispers against Ilya’s ear, Shane slides his hand up and down his boyfriend’s arm, the tickling pressure drifting from Ilya’s shoulder to his elbow.

Ilya leans into the touch, his mouth relaxing into a tense smile. Then he kisses him again, unable to help himself. “We should go inside then.” When Shane just keeps kissing him, Ilya pushes him back, a smirk tugging at his tingling lips. “Stop kissing me, Hollander.”

With a laugh that warms Ilya from the inside out, Shane smacks one last kiss to Ilya’s cold cheek before grabbing his hand with a smile, pulling them both up the steps and through the front door without knocking.

“Shane?” Yuna Hollander’s voice sounds from somewhere further back in the house filled with a cozy warmth. The smell of freshly made food wafts through the air.

They drop both their coats by the door before Shane grabs for Ilya’s hand again, keeping it in his as they walk through the living room to the kitchen. He only drops it once he goes to hug his mom who’s standing at the stove stirring a pot of steaming something.

“Merry Christmas, honey.”

Yuna holds her son for a few moments, and Ilya drops his eyes to the tiles at his feet while they embrace, feeling like an outsider, like he shouldn't be intruding on such a personal moment between –

“Merry Christmas, Ilya.” Before he knows it, he's wrapped in a hug that smells like cloves and cranberries, Yuna's strong yet gentle grip wrapped around his shoulders as she pulls him in without hesitation. “We watched your game last night.” She murmurs the words into his curls, fingers squeezing his shoulders one last time before falling away. “You did well. Not the rest of the team,” she makes sure to clarify, “just you.”

Ilya huffs a laugh into her shoulder at the compliment.

“Good stuff,” a deeper voice confirms, interjecting into the conversation. “Merry Christmas, boys.”

Ilya pulls away from Yuna's hug to see David behind him, arms open as he waits for his own hug. Feeling a bit out of sorts, Ilya steps into that one too, though it's much shorter than before. Shorter but no less welcome he realizes when David ends the embrace with a solid pat to his shoulder.

For some reason Ilya suddenly feels dizzy.

His fingers search for balance. They land on top of a chair by his hip. He pulls it back, landing with an inelegant plop. “Merry Christmas.” The words sound oddly scratchy in his throat, his tongue clumsy as he forms the unfamiliar phrase he's heard directed at him more times in the space of three minutes than he has his entire life.

If they notice his odd behavior, the Hollanders don't let on. Yuna rattles on about his and Shane's latest games, some areas she noticed both of them improving on since last season, before she turns back to the stove. Shane joins her, leaving Ilya at the table with David who sits across from him, gesturing at the half finished puzzle in between them with a smile.

“You mind? Yuna gave it to me this morning.”

Ilya glances down at the half finished scene, a village covered in snow, little people milling about with Christmas lights strung around the entire scene. Nothing terribly original or exciting about it. A boring picture really.

Without answering he reaches for a border piece near his elbow, adding it to the bottom of a half-finished tree. “Genetic,” he whispers to himself with a smile before he falls into a comfortable silence with the man across from him, both of them working together without comment.

By the time Yuna and Shane join them, there's less than a hundred pieces still to be added. Ilya snaps the piece in his hand into place before David pushes the mostly finished scene to the side, sweeping the leftover pieces into a box sitting on the corner of the table.

There's a squeeze at his shoulders as Shane drops a kiss on top of his head, pressing another one against his temple as he takes a seat next to Ilya, reaching for the hand that rests where the puzzle pieces just were. Ilya squeezes it without comment. His heart feeling so full he thinks it might burst in his chest.

"I made this for you," Yuna's voice sounds from behind him as she brings a bowl of something to the table. She puts it in front of him without further comment, going back to the stove to get more food, waving David over to help her.

Ilya's fingers tighten around Shane's as she notices what she's given him. It's a plate of salad, but nothing he'd been expecting to see at a Canadian Christmas table. It's a Russian food, a salad made of potato, egg, pickles, carrots, and ham.

"I told you she was nervous." He hears the smile in Shane's voice, looks up from the bowl at his boyfriend's face. "I guess she has a friend at work whose grandma is Russian. Asked her what would be a good food to make for Christmas Eve dinner."

Ilya swallows around the lump in his throat. "Is good food," he confirms with a nod.

Shane presses their fingers together again, lifting Ilya's hand to his mouth to brush a kiss against the back of his knuckles. "Merry Christmas, Ilya."

Ilya wants nothing more than to strip him naked and fuck him into the floor, a stupid smile on his face the entire time he pounds into Shane's warmth, his heart overflowing with the ridiculous amount of love he feels for this man.

Yuna and David join them then with the rest of the food, reminding Ilya that they aren't alone. Later though...

He smirks at Shane, a filthy promise in his eyes that brings a flush of pink to his boyfriend's cheeks.

"Looks great," he says sincerely, his foot knocking against Shane's under the table as he brings their joined hands to rest against his thigh.

Yuna just smiles, telling him to help himself to the food. A stupid grin sits on his face for the rest of the meal, eating one handed as the one pressing Shane's against his leg stays in place the whole time. He and Yuna do most of the talking, Shane and David content to interject every now and then with a comment of their own. Shane even drinks a glass of wine, digging into the holiday meal without asking for his usual boring fare of rice and fish. It's the most perfect dinner Ilya could have asked for.

Afterward, all three men help Yuna clean up before they make their way to the living room. Ilya settles into the corner of the couch, eyes roving around the space as he takes in the various pictures dotting the room. He spots one of Shane as a little boy, hockey stick clutched proudly to his chest as he stands in the middle of a frozen lake, a carefree smile stretching his reddened cheeks.

Ilya pulls Shane down next to him on the couch, nuzzling his face against the curve of Shane's ear. "You are so cute, Милый."

Shane's been learning enough Russian for his cheeks to warm to the same shade of red as in the picture. "Shut up," he whispers without heat, curling into Ilya's side as Yuna retrieves a present from under the tree.

"Mom, I thought we said not until tomorrow," Shane says as she drops the green box wrapped up in red strings into Ilya's lap.

His mom shrugs, going to perch on the arm of David's chair right next to the couch as she waits for Ilya to open the present. "I wanted Ilya to have this one early. We can do the rest tomorrow."

Ilya thinks of the cashmere scarf he bought for her sitting under Shane's tree back at the cottage. Suddenly the gift seems more insignificant than when he bought it weeks ago. He'd spotted it at a boutique in Boston. The soft color of brown had reminded him of Shane's eyes.

"You didn't have to –"

She cuts him off with a firm but kind smile. "I wanted to. The way you love Shane..." her throat tightens for a moment, the flash of emotion in her eyes the most vulnerability he's ever seen from Shane's strong, confident mother. Her throat works around a swallow. "The way you love him," she starts again, looping an arm around her husband's shoulders as they both study him with a look of approval he never saw from his own father, one he can barely remember from his mother whose face has started to fade from memory with each passing year. "How could we not love you too?"

"You didn't have to," he says again, the protest a feeble whisper as he pulls the box in his lap to his chest. He means more than just the present. Welcoming him into their home, their family. Making him food his own family never thought to feed him at Christmas. Allowing him to love their son.

Yuna smiles at him, the corners of her mouth tightening with some emotion he can't fully understand. "We just wanted you to feel at home."

Ilya looks down. His nose burns, the ribbons wrapped around the green paper swimming together in a red haze as his eyes inexplicably fill with tears. Squeezing the box so hard the paper wrinkles, tearing at the top where his thumb presses against it, he takes a deep breath, trying to find the words to explain how he wouldn't know what that felt like. Not before Shane anyway.

Instead of giving voice to the thoughts he's having trouble translating to a language they would understand, he lifts the corner of the paper, sliding a slim box out from the shiny green paper. He puts the paper next to him on the couch, making sure not to wrinkle it further as he places the box on his knees, lifting the lid to reveal a toque. He touches it, the cashmere soft and warm against the tips of his fingers. It's brown, the same shade of Shane's eyes. He takes it out, noticing something shiny at the bottom of the box.

He looks up from the key with a knot of confusion between his eyebrows.

It's David's turn to speak this time. "Since you'll be around a lot more after this season with Boston is over, we figured it's best if you have your own key. So you can come over anytime."

"With or without Shane," Yuna tacks on. "You'll always be welcome even if he isn't tagging along."

"Thanks, Mom," Shane mumbles from next to him, but there's no bite to the words, just fondness.

Ilya blinks rapidly, pulling the key from the bottom of the box, wrapping his fingers around it to nestle the cold bit of metal in the center of his palm. "Home." He tests the word on his tongue, looking across the room at two faces that look so much like his favorite one in the world. "Yes, feels like home." He has to take a moment to compose himself before saying a softly worded, "thank you," the simple words filled with an infinite amount of gratitude.

It's not the most articulate way to state how he feels, but both Yuna and David seem to understand.

Giving him a gentle smile in return, David turns on a Christmas movie as Ilya settles back against Shane, tucking the key and toque into his pocket as he nuzzles his nose into Shane's hair, squeezing his eyes shut as he tries to get a reign on emotions that feel too overwhelming, too much.

Shane seems to understand, his hand wrapping around Ilya's knee, a much needed grounding force as Ilya's heart slows to a regular rhythm, Shane's mouth pressed to the side of his face, the corner of his leaking eyes. They sit like that the whole movie, Shane wrapped around Ilya like a blanket as his parents sit on the other side of the room, the drone of the tv slowly lulling Ilya to sleep in Shane's arms.

Before he knows it, Shane's shaking him gently. He opens his eyes to find the room empty now except for the two of them.

"I fell asleep," Ilya says stupidly.

"Yeah," Shane says fondly, pressing a kiss to his head as he wraps his fingers around Ilya's, pulling him to his feet.

"I didn't say –" Ilya starts to protest as Shane grabs their jackets that had been left by the front door.

"They know," Shane assures him, shrugging his coat on as Ilya does the same. He pulls the toque from his pocket, fingers brushing against the key as he pulls the soft fabric free to shove it over his ears. Shane just looks at him for a moment, his own eyes shiny in the dim light.

He holds out his hand, waiting for Ilya to take it. When he does, Shane squeezes once, twice, three times.

“Come on,” he pulls his boyfriend into his arms, lips sealing over Ilya’s with the sweetest kiss. “Let’s go home.”

Ilya returns the kiss, tongue slipping into Shane’s mouth, tasting happiness that feels like the home he’s heard so much about tonight. “Yes,” he whispers back, his heart so full he doesn’t know how he can stand it. How he can live with so much love contained in the small space of his heart in his chest. He kisses Shane one last time before letting go. “Yes, let’s go home.”

End Notes

I was fully planning to write something much more x rated for these two, but then I started writing and ended up with this "home is where the heart is" fluff instead. Hopefully it's still enjoyable without the smut I had originally planned, but thank you so much for reading!

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