

The Best Time of the Year

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The Best Time of the Year

by [OnMyShore](#)

Summary

Shane's eyes dart to the tree and back to Ilya. "I mean. You don't think it looks a little uneven?"

Ilya's eyebrows go up, and he whips his head around to look at the tree before rounding on Shane again. "What do you mean 'uneven?' The whole fucking thing is covered in lights, there's hardly any tree left."

"You don't think there are too many on one side?"

"Absolutely not."

"Okay, just - look at it from this angle." Shane gives his sleeve a tug, pulling Ilya over to stand next to him, watching his eyes sweep up and down the tree. Finally, Ilya says, "You are crazy."

Decorating a tree together can actually be so personal.

Notes

Takes place at some indiscriminate point after the end of Season 1. Timeline? I don't know her. I'm just here to have a good time.

“There.” Ilya tucks the end of a string of lights into the branches, giving the tree a gentle shake. “What do you think?”

When Shane doesn’t immediately answer, Ilya turns to him, eyes narrowing when he realizes Shane isn’t about to start singing his praises. “What?”

Shane blinks. “No, nothing. It’s just...”

“Just what, what’s the problem?”

Shane’s eyes dart to the tree and back to Ilya. “I mean. You don’t think it looks a little uneven?”

Ilya’s eyebrows go up, and he whips his head around to look at the tree before rounding on Shane again. “What do you mean ‘uneven?’ The whole fucking thing is covered in lights, there’s hardly any tree left.”

“You don’t think there are too many on one side?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Okay, just - look at it from this angle.” Shane gives his sleeve a tug, pulling Ilya over to stand next to him, watching his eyes sweep up and down the tree. Finally, Ilya says, “You are crazy.”

“What? No, I’m not!” He’s not, there’s definitely (and *obviously*) a higher concentration of lights on one side than the other. “I can’t believe you don’t see it.”

Ilya hums. “Perhaps concussion was worse than you thought? Maybe it messed up your eyes.”

“My eyes are fine.”

“Should you get your glasses and look again?”

“My glasses are for reading, not distance.”

“Maybe put them on and try standing closer.”

Ilya’s smirking, and Shane wants to tell him to go fuck himself, but he finds himself biting back a smile instead. It’s been happening more and more lately - Ilya will tease, needle him for a reaction, and Shane will have to fight off the urge to swoon like a lovesick dope. It’s infuriating. He loves it.

The lights still look like shit, though.

Ilya tilts his head at the tree, considering, and says, “You don’t like it.”

Shane opens his mouth with the full intention of finding something encouraging to say, but he doesn't get a chance because Ilya huffs a sigh and says, "Okay. We start over."

"What? You've been doing this for like an hour and a half!"

"And still you are not happy." Ilya starts tugging on the lights.

"I take it back, it's perfect."

"Is not."

"It's *fine*."

"I don't want fine, I want good." Ilya shakes his head. "You don't like it, we do it again."

"You don't have to do the whole thing," Shane insists, because this really has been going on longer than it needed to and he's got other plans for them. "Just even it out a little - no, don't start at the top like that."

"You want to do it for me?" Ilya snaps, but he does stop pulling the lights from the top so that's something.

"Do you want me to?" Shane takes a step forward even though he'd spent a considerable amount of time over breakfast complaining about how much he hated this part.

"No. I want you to sit down and stay out of my way. I've got this."

Shane rolls his eyes but does as he's told, flopping onto the sofa while Ilya fiddles with the tree and curses in Russian under his breath.

"You know," he says after a few minutes of struggle, "you could probably hire someone to do all this for you."

"Yeah, I've done that a few times," Shane admits, feeling embarrassed but not sure why. It's not like Ilya doesn't know he's used a decorator before.

Ilya glances at him. "You weren't happy with their work either?"

Shane huffs a laugh. "No. I mean, everything looked really nice, but it was almost...I don't know, too perfect? It made the house feel like a hotel, it was weird." A beat. "I don't think 'too perfect' will be a problem here, though."

This time, Ilya glares at him for real, and Shane can't keep the grin off his face.

"You should be nicer to me," Ilya says, going back to his work. "It's my first time doing this. Dealing with stupid lights."

It could be an innocuous comment, or it could be a coded invitation for Shane to ask more questions. With Ilya, it's always hard to tell.

Throwing caution to the wind, Shane says, “You didn’t celebrate Christmas back home?”

Ilya’s mouth turns down in a frown, but it’s thoughtful, not irritated or upset. “No, we do, but not the same. Different.”

“How so?”

Ilya shrugs. “We celebrate in January, for one thing.”

“Wow, that’s weird,” Shane says, without realizing how that sounds until Ilya gives him a look over his shoulder. “No, I meant...that’s different.”

Ilya nods in a way that’s clearly making fun of him. “Yes. Like I said.”

“Shut up.” Shane rolls his eyes. “Okay, so...what else? Did you, like, put up decorations and stuff?”

“Mm, no, not like this.” Ilya shakes his head. “Not quite so...I don’t know. Elaborate?”

Shane scoffs. “I don’t know if I’d call one tree elaborate.”

Ilya gives him another look and says, “It’s a big fucking tree, Hollander.”

Shane just shakes his head, settling back into the cushions. For a few minutes, he watches Ilya work, and only has to bite back a comment once.

“My mother used to decorate,” Ilya says suddenly, and Shane sits up a little straighter, but Ilya’s at just the right angle that he can’t quite read his face. “When she was still alive. Nothing fancy. Small tree - not like yours.”

It’s a tease, a chance to opt out, but instead of taking the bait, Shane just says, “That sounds nice.”

“Oh yes, very nice. She liked it, I think.” Another pause. “My father, not so much.”

“He wasn’t into it?” Shane winces at his clunky wording, but Ilya just shakes his head. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine. It was her thing, not his.” He pulls in a breath. “He thought it was waste of time. Pointless.”

“Yeah but - I mean, he still could have tried to...”

“Maybe. But he didn’t.”

Shane wishes Ilya would look at him, but he’s staring at the tree with the intensity of a field surgeon. At a loss for anything better to say, Shane says, “Not everything has to have a point. Sometimes it’s okay to do things just because they’re nice.”

For a moment there's silence, just long enough for Shane to think he's said the wrong thing (which is unfair, because his first instinct had been "fuck your father" and he'd managed to resist that urge just fine). Finally, though, Ilya says, "True. Which is why we're doing it now."

There's definitely more there to unpack, but Shane has been getting better at reading Ilya, at figuring out when to push and when to let things be. Right now, in the glow of the lights, with the afternoon fading to twilight outside, Shane feels his face soften into a smile and decides to let things be.

Ilya makes a considering noise and steps back to consider his handiwork. As soon as he's within reach, Shane grabs his hand and pulls him onto the sofa with him. Ilya goes willingly, allowing Shane to draw him in close and wrap his arms around his shoulders. Tilting his head so it's resting against his chest, he brings a hand up to cover one of Shane's hands, thumb rubbing gentle circle into his skin. Shane presses a kiss into his hair before resting his cheek against the same spot.

It's perfect for all of ten seconds, and then Ilya says, "It looked better before."

"Fuck you, it did not!" Shane sputters, and Ilya's laughing as Shane grabs the nearest pillow and whacks it into his face. "Look how much better that looks, are you serious?"

"If you're happy, that's all that matters. Even if you are wrong." Trailing a hand up the inseam of Shane's pant leg, he says, "Maybe you could think of a way to reward me for all my hard work?"

"Maybe later," Shane says, pushing his hand back down with all the willpower he can muster. "Let's get the rest of the shit on the tree first so we don't have to deal with it anymore."

Ilya groans like he's just received a prison sentence. "How are we not done yet?"

"It's tradition," Shane says, giving him a nudge.

"I hate this."

"Yeah well, that's part of the tradition too." Shane jostles him slightly. "Come on. Let's get this over with, and then I'm all yours for the rest of the night."

Ilya gives him a look with heat behind his eyes. "Is that a promise, Hollander?"

"It's a threat, Rozanov." He leans down to capture Ilya's mouth with his own, sliding a hand into his hair to pull him closer just the way he knows he likes.

Well. Maybe the tree can wait, after all.

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