

## the gift is to the giver

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# the gift is to the giver

by [UglyGreenJacket](#)

## Summary

Shane loves Christmas. He always has. A quiet time surrounded by family, with good food and presents, and time to let his brain just sit. He can't wait to bask in his parents' love and attention, being with people who he (mostly) doesn't have to hide or perform around. Though he'd be lying if he said that his thoughts have been solely on them.

Because every time he's not busy, he finds his thoughts wandering to Ilya Rozanov. What is Rozanov doing? Does he even celebrate Christmas? Does he wish he could spend it back home in Russia? Does he have anyone to spend Christmas with? Would he want to spend it with Shane if he could?

Fucking, of course. They would be fucking, because that's what they do. Always. There is absolutely nothing else there.

But still, in the quietest moments, he wonders...

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Or, Christmas keeps finding Shane and Ilya at every stage of their lives— from rivals, to lovers, to husbands

## Notes

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

2015

The sound of Shane's doorbell buzzer makes him jump.

It's Christmas Eve, and the only plans he has for the evening are lying in bed reading a book before falling asleep early so he can head to Ottawa the next morning to spend the break at his parents' house.

Shane loves Christmas. He always has. A quiet time surrounded by family, with good food and presents, and time to let his brain just sit. He can't wait to bask in his parents' love and attention, being with people who he (mostly) doesn't have to hide or perform around. Though he'd be lying if he said that his thoughts have been solely on them.

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But still, in the quietest moments, he wonders...

His slippered feet pad softly toward the buzzing sound, looking briefly through the peephole to see who could possibly be at his door on Christmas Eve night. He sees a delivery driver and quickly opens the door.

"Shane Hollander?" the guy asks, looking Shane up and down. "Oh, of course you are, who am I kidding? Big fan," he says, sticking out his hand for Shane to take while still holding whatever package he's dropping off.

"Uh...thanks," Shane replies awkwardly. He takes the hand and shakes it twice before he drops it, trying hard not to flex his hand to ring out the contact. He's ready to get this interaction over with as soon as he can. He has a distracting book to get back to.

But the driver still looks at him, obviously a little starstruck. "Is that for me?" Shane asks, pointing to the package, trying to move things along.

"Oh, right, sorry," the driver says, and finally looks away towards the package. "Seems like..." he pauses to look at the sender's name, "...Lily really wanted you to get this today."

The name pings in Shane's brain, and his eyes grow wide.

"Sent it express from Boston." The package is thrust into Shane's hands, and Shane looks over his name and address printed in a neat scrawl, hardly believing what he's seeing. "Can't imagine how much that costs these days. Anyway, Merry Christmas, and um, thank you for your service to our city."

The driver salutes him, and Shane can't think of any way to respond, so he just nods and closes the door.

Shane stands in his entryway for several long moments. Had Rozanov *actually* sent him a Christmas present? And if so, what the fuck could it possibly be? A bomb?

Curiosity eventually wins out, and Shane makes his way to the kitchen to grab a knife, not wasting any more time getting the box open.

There's a note on top of what looks to be a neatly folded jersey.

*Thought you might want something to wear when your favorite player wins the Stanley Cup this year.*

*Xoxo –Lily*

Shane moves the note aside and pulls out a pristine Boston jersey with Rozanov's number and number plastered on the back. He's even signed it, the *I* and *R* of his name greatly exaggerated for effect.

"Asshole," Shane says, but it sounds almost affectionate, and he realizes he's smiling, secretly loving that Rozanov took the time to send this to him. No matter how much of a dick move it is.

He grabs his phone and takes a photo of the jersey.

*Shane [19:37]: Thanks for the jersey. Can't wait to turn into a towel or something so it's actually useful.*

A response comes almost immediately.

*Lily [19:38]: I get to take it off of you either way 😈 I am clearly still winner here*

Shane laughs, the sound filling the dead space in his apartment. He starts to type out several different messages. (*How are you? Can't wait to see you in a couple of weeks. I feel like I miss you and it terrifies me.*) He finally settles on a simple:

*Shane [19:38]: Merry Christmas*

*Lily [19:39]: Merry Christmas*

He packs the jersey back up in the box, and hides it deep in his closet. He will get rid of it, he tells himself.

Eventually.

Two weeks later, after Boston loses to Montreal, Shane sends Rozanov a signed jersey of his own.

*Something to keep you warm during hard times.*

*2017*

Shane sighs, unlocking his door after coming home from Hayden's Christmas Eve party. The party had been fine. Hayden is Shane's best friend, so he's always happy to spend time with him and their teammates; it's just that Shane pretty much always has another place he'd rather be these days.

He's looking forward to crashing as soon as he gets inside and sleeping as much of the next couple of days as he can. Shane normally enjoys the Christmas break, but this year, his parents decided to have a getaway to London, and even though he and Ilya are official now, it hadn't made sense to ask him to come all the way from Boston for a day.

Not that he hadn't thought about asking anyway. The past few months since they'd decided to really give this thing between them a shot have been difficult. Shane misses Ilya like a second lung. But he's trying his best not to be selfish with Ilya's time. Ilya needs rest, too, and as much as it bothers Shane to be alone for Christmas, he'll survive.

He steps inside and takes off his shoes, dropping his keys in the bowl by the door.

"Hello, Shane," a familiar voice says, and Shane nearly jumps out of his skin.

Ilya steps into the entryway, and Shane could cry from the sight of him if he weren't currently recovering from a heart attack.

"Holy shit, Ilya, you scared me," he says in a rush of breath, hand coming up to clutch at the fabric over his pounding heart.

Ilya smiles boyishly, a look Shane is still getting used to having directed at him so freely. He takes a moment to look at him as his heart calms down. Ilya is beautiful with his golden-brown and tan skin. He's wearing sweats that hug his waist and a skin-tight t-shirt that shows off his arms in the most delicious way.

*Fuck, Shane thinks. I want him to take me apart.*

He can feel his face heating when Ilya says, "I wanted to surprise you."

Shane laughs, and it shakes a little, his nerves and not-all-that-unwelcomed horniness still settling. "Consider me surprised," he says, and then, "How are you here?"

Ilya's face falls a bit. "You are not happy to see me?"

Shane closes the distance between them, leaning up to place a light kiss on Ilya's now pouting mouth. "I'm thrilled to see you. I've missed you so much."

Sometimes it still feels strange to say such things out loud. They had spent nearly ten years hiding not only from the world, but also their true feelings from one another. But the way Ilya's shoulders relax and the dreamy smile returns, Shane's infinitely glad they can be honest now.

Vulnerability's a fucking trip, but it's so worth it.

"I missed you, too," Ilya says and envelops Shane into a hug so tight he can barely breathe.

"Did you drive up here?" Shane asks when he's allowed to draw in air again.

"Yes. Is a long way. Canadian border agents are not nice," he says, and Shane laughs.

But then he's struck with a thought that brings the panic back. "Oh, god, what car did you drive? Please tell me it wasn't the Lamborghini." A bright, garish yellow thing that Shane is convinced could be seen from space.

"I rented a car," Ilya says quietly.

And hearing that is a relief, but then, "Did anyone see you come in? Were you wearing a hat or something, I—"

Ilya takes his hand and squeezes. "No one saw me, Shane. No one recognized me. No one knows I'm here."

"Right," Shane exhales and throws Ilya an apologetic look. "Sorry."

"Is okay." There's a sadness in Ilya's eyes he knows won't go away permanently for years.

"I just don't want anything to fuck up our plan."

"I know," Ilya replies. "I am careful, I swear."

It's then that something catches Shane's eye.

"What is all this?" he asks, looking around Ilya and into the dining room where his usually empty table is set for two, complete with candles, stoneware, and from the smell that's finally registering in Shane's brain, something delicious.

"I...uh, asked your mother about Japan Christmas," Ilya says, rubbing a hand at the back of his neck, and Shane can see a slight blush to his cheeks even in the dim lighting. "She said it's a...a date night? And since we cannot go on real date, I brought it here."

Shane is instantly so charmed. He walks to the table and turns back. "You asked my mom about Japanese Christmas?"

"You are Japanese, yes?" Ilya asks, and Shane can tell he's flustered.

"Partly," Shane laughs.

“Is not weird to do this then, right?” he says, starting to sound a bit defensive, and Shane knows he’s got some soothing to do.

He walks back to Ilya and cups his face in his hands. “You drove all the way from Boston to give me a Christmas Eve date?”

“Too much?” Ilya asks, and Shane can tell he’s a little nervous about the answer.

It’s a weird transition going from pretending you’re nothing to one another to being everything to each other, so Shane offers reassurance.

“No, it’s perfect,” he says. “Thank you. I’m starving, and it smells incredible.”

“Hayden did not feed you?” Ilya asks.

“Uh, no, Jackie is out of town visiting her parents with the kids, so all he had was beer and chips.”

“How is he a person?”

Shane cracks up at that. “Jackie keeps him alive.”

Ilya smiles back and leads him to the table.

“Did you make this?” Shane questions when he sees the spread in full for the first time. A roasted chicken, sauteed vegetables, potatoes, bread, and an expensive-looking bottle of wine.

“Ah, no,” Ilya replies, pouring Shane a glass. “Your mother helped me plan everything.”

Which makes Shane wonder, “Do you talk to my mom often?”

“Mhmm,” Ilya says with a grin, beginning to dish out food onto Shane’s plate first and then his own. “She texts me about things I can improve on after every game.”

Shane grins back and shakes his head fondly. Of course she does.

When he takes his first bite, Shane groans at how good it tastes. This meal isn’t exactly in his strict diet, but he’s willing to break that tonight for Ilya, and considering what it *should* have consisted of, he’s grateful.

“Good?” Ilya asks while forking a potato.

“Amazing,” he says, “Though if you’re going authentic Japanese Christmas, it should be fried and from Kentucky.”

“Your mom told me, but I didn’t feel like hearing you gripe for a week, so,” he gestures with his fork toward the food, “healthy.”

“Thank you for your sacrifice,” Shane deadpans, and Ilya laughs.

“Do not worry, there is Christmas cake, though,” he says.

Shane is once again completely charmed. “You know, somehow I didn’t doubt that for a second.”

They eat together and talk easily about their upcoming schedules and the happenings on their various teams, and Shane laughs as Ilya animatedly tells him about some bet he’d made with his team about the next game.

It’s so nice and normal, Shane almost forgets for a while.

Ilya is cutting him a small piece of fluffy sponge cake when he asks, “Do you not feel Japanese?”

Shane looks at him, confused. “What?”

“Earlier, you said you were partly Japanese.”

“Well, I am,” Shane says with a shrug. “Only half.”

“Half is still a lot,” Ilya responds. “I eat half this cake, and you act like I will die tomorrow.”

“You’re not wrong,” he says, and takes a breath. “I guess, I feel like most of the time, I’m whatever people want me to be. If they want to see me as white, I’m white. If they want me to be Asian, I’m Asian. It’s like a convenience thing.”

“That seems yucky,” Ilya says, and it sounds silly, but Shane can’t really think of a better word for it.

“Mmm,” he mumbles around a bite of cake.

“But how do you see yourself?”

Shane sits with the question for a moment, idly pushing a strawberry around on his plate to give himself time to think.

“I dunno,” he says finally. “I wish I were more connected to that side of me a lot. My grandparents came here after the war, and my mom was born here. They worked so hard to assimilate that I think they just kind of left a lot of the Japanese traditions behind. My mom can barely speak any Japanese.”

“Assi-what?” Ilya asks, apparently not understanding the word.

“Assimilate, like...fit in to society. Blending in. Behaving in a way the majority finds acceptable.”

Ilya smiles a little sadly. “Sounds like someone I know.”

“I have to,” Shane admits, and his own voice mirrors Ilya’s look. “I can’t be too white, because then I’m denying a part of myself, but if I try to embrace being Asian, suddenly I’m not Asian enough to do that. It’s a double-edged sword.”

“Sounds fucking awful.”

“It’s easier to try and fit in however I can,” Shane says. “I don’t want to become anyone’s token, so I just try not to give them a reason to make me that.”

“Well, you are,” Ilya tells him with conviction. “Japanese. No matter what anyone thinks.”

It’s the first time anyone’s ever said anything like that to him. Even he and his mom had never really discussed what it meant to be Japanese in a predominantly white world. They’d both just been so focused on getting Shane to the top that they mostly ignored the constant microaggressions and racist thinking.

“Thank you,” Shane says simply, his voice a bit choked because it means a lot to have someone acknowledge that side of him without anything to gain from it.

He thinks maybe he should start paying attention more, caring more. Not necessarily about what people think of him, he already cares too much about that, but maybe he’s finally at a point in his career where he can call some things out. Maybe he doesn’t have to ignore it anymore.

“Have you been there before? To Japan?” Ilya asks after a beat of silence.

“Yeah, when I was younger, before hockey took over our lives. I still have a lot of family there.”

“Would you take me there someday?”

“You want to go to Japan with me?”

“I want to go everywhere with you,” Ilya says so seriously, if Shane knew Ilya any less, he might think Ilya is fucking with him. But the earnestness in his eyes gives it away.

“Okay,” he agrees, even though he has no idea when it would even be remotely possible. Certainly not now. Definitely not when they announce the charity. Probably not even after they’ve come out together because of their schedules. But the thought of taking Ilya to a place that holds so much of his family’s history is incredibly appealing. “Someday, we’ll go together. You can take me on a Christmas date in Japan.”

“Will you eat fried chicken?”

“Absolutely not.”

Ilya beams at him, and Shane desperately wishes they could go now. That they could just announce who they are to each other, opinions and careers be damned. But the promise of someday is the only gift he can give right now, and he’s grateful that it’s enough. At least for now.

Of course, he also has a bottle of Ilya's favorite vodka wrapped up in the kitchen that he'd spent a ridiculous amount of money importing that he needs to give him, but straddling him in the chair he currently sits in seems way more important at the moment.

2020

*I already chose you, Hollander.*

He can't get the words out of his head. Or the look on Ilya's face. Or the fact that Ilya had told him to leave.

Shane feels slightly better after talking to his mom, but he can't shake the overwhelming feeling of dread that sits in his stomach.

He walks to the closet in his bedroom and drops to his knees, rummaging around behind his shoes for a specific box.

He opens it carefully and starts crying again, pulling out a Boston jersey Ilya had signed and sent him as a joke for Christmas one year before they were anything official. He traces the team logo on the front with shaking fingers.

Ilya had given up *everything* to move to Ottawa for Shane, and while logically Shane knows this, he's never really taken the time to stop and think about how that must have felt. Because in his mind, Ilya's move was just the next step in them being together for *real*, and Ilya had seemed more than happy to do it.

But just because Ilya's moving to Canada had been a good thing, a *wonderful* thing, didn't mean he hadn't suffered.

Ilya's entire life has been one of upheaval. The death of his mother. Getting drafted. Living in a new country. Falling in love with Shane. His father's illness and death. His fallout with his family. Coming to terms with the fact that he could really never go back to Russia. Moving to Ottawa. Being with Shane.

Just because he's used to it doesn't make it easy.

But he'd fit so nicely into Shane's life, had never complained, and so...

Shane hugs the jersey to his chest. He knows it won't smell like Ilya, but he breathes it in anyway.

He never told Ilya he'd kept this. And as tears splash onto the stiff polyester, he thinks of so many things he hasn't told Ilya. Things he just assumes Ilya knows because so much of their relationship has always been communicated in unconventional ways.

*You're it for me. You have been since the moment I met you, even if I didn't want to admit it. I love how much you love my family. I love how much my family loves you. I love the set of your mouth when you're concentrating on something. I love being your rival. I love being yours. I hate how much time we wasted. I hate how we have to hide. You're the best part of me. Of fucking course I would give all of this up for you.*

He's not sure that saying any of this to Ilya now would be helpful. Ilya's hurt and clearly needs space, and Shane will do his damndest to respect that, no matter how badly he wants to get back in his Jeep and cross the distance between them.

But instead, he walks back to the living room and his bag that he'd left on the couch. He quickly finds what he's looking for. His present from Ilya: a framed picture of them from the first ad campaign they'd done together before their rookie season.

His fingers brush against Ilya's face in the photo. They're both so young in it, literal kids laughing and excited about what the future has for them. They have no idea that their lives are going to change irrevocably just hours after the photo is taken.

How deeply they would come to love each other.

Shane walks towards his bedroom with purposeful steps.

He told Ilya he would take the frame to the cottage. It would be safer there. Less of a chance anyone would see it. But Shane suddenly recognizes that that's not enough.

He places the photo boldly on his nightstand, taking some deep breaths to still the panic it gives him. Shane's worked for years to keep Ilya a secret, and even this little bit of rebellion that is likely never to be seen by anyone makes him uneasy.

But it's an important first step, he thinks, and even though it's as brave as he can be in that moment, it still feels huge.

A quiet and visual acknowledgement of Ilya's place in his life.

He snaps a photo of it and sends it to Ilya. He doesn't get a response right away, so he takes more deep breaths and tells himself that it's okay. He slips on the jersey, trying to imagine it's a hug from Ilya.

When he finally falls asleep, he dreams that he had kissed Ilya that day, right after the picture was taken in front of an entire crowd of people. Unashamed.

2021

They spend their first Christmas after they get married at the cottage. It's a long trip to make for just a couple of days, but they've worked their asses off for the first few months of the season, and Shane desperately just wants to get away from the craziness.

So, they load Anya up in the car and go.

Ilya sleeps most of the way with Anya in his lap, and Shane can't help but smile at how peaceful they both look.

Since the wedding and Shane's move to Ottawa, things have been good. Really, really good, and he knows just how lucky he is to have this life. They'd worked so fucking hard for it, after all.

They're greeted when they arrive by his parents, who'd come out a couple of days earlier to get everything ready. Shane's insides turn to goo when Ilya picks up his mother and swings her around in a hug while Anya barks happily around their feet.

They work all day cooking, and when the time comes to eat, Shane indulges, enjoying every bite and flavor that hits his tongue. After dinner, they play a particularly contentious game of Yahtzee, and then Ilya places a pillow against his mom's lap and curls up like a child to sleep. She runs practiced, soothing hands against his curly hair while they watch *Black Christmas*.

It's such a perfect day, and Shane feels a deep contentment settle into his bones that, up until six months ago, would have felt like an impossible dream.

His parents head off to bed, opting to stay at Shane's instead of sleeping at their own cottage just up the road. Which, unfortunately, means no wild sex for him and Ilya this trip, but he supposes that's a small price to pay.

When they're alone in their bedroom, Anya tucked into her bed that Shane is pretty sure costs almost as much as their own, Shane pulls out an envelope from his bags and hands it to a sleepy-looking Ilya.

"What is this?" Ilya asks, eyeing it warily. "Are you divorcing me already?"

Shane rolls his eyes. "It's your gift, asshole."

"I thought we said no gifts this year."

"You want me to believe you didn't get me anything?" he says somewhat accusatively.

Ilya looks slightly guilty. "Mine did not cost anything," he defends.

"Mine didn't either."

Ilya finally takes the envelope and shakes it. "Oh, god, Shane. You got me paper?" He clutches it to his chest. "I am swept off my feet."

Shane bites his lip to keep from smiling. "Shut up and open it."

Ilya does, his large hands carefully removing the contents of the envelope. His forehead creases as he looks over the words on the official-looking document, eyes scanning the page as he tries to understand.

“What is this?” he asks once he reaches the point Shane knew would make him pause.

He sees his name.

“It’s the deed to the cottage,” Shane replies. “I had your name added. We…” he takes in a breath, “We own it together now.”

Ilya’s hazel eyes snap up and search Shane’s. “Why would you do this?”

Shane laughs a little nervously, unsure if Ilya is upset or just trying to process what’s in front of him. “This…isn’t just my place anymore. Our best memories are here. We’re most ourselves when we’re here. It’s *ours*, it’s been ours for a long time. I just needed to make it official.”

Ilya stares back down at the paper, and Shane can see tears starting to pool in the corners of his eyes. He then holds the deed against his chest reverently, and the finally tears spill over. “Fuck you, Shane Hollander.”

Shane laughs again, but it’s not hesitant this time. It’s full of joy and love, and the pure sunshine Ilya Rozanov brings into his life. He steps closer to Ilya and kisses him, pouring everything he can into their touch of lips.

Ilya deepens it, and his gift flutters to the floor in favor of holding Shane’s face gently between his hands, and Shane realizes in that instant that Ilya encompasses so much. He’s hard and rough and dominating. But he’s also impossibly soft and kind and good. He is all of these things wrapped into a perfect person.

“I thought you said you did not spend money,” Ilya says softly when they finally part.

“I mean, I had to pay a lawyer a little bit, but—”

“The cottage cost millions, Shane,” Ilya teases, and Shane lightly hits his arm.

“When I *built* it, sure.”

“Is worth more now,” Ilya counters, full of meaning.

“A lot more, yeah,” Shane says before leaning up to kiss Ilya again. “Can I have my present now?”

“So eager.” Ilya bops Shane’s nose with his finger, gaze full of affection. He bends and picks up his gift from the floor, placing it on a nearby dresser, and then walks towards his own bag, pulling out a small box that can very clearly only hold one thing.

“Did you get me jewelry?” he asks, incredulous.

Ilya holds out the box. “Shut up and open it,” Ilya says in an echo of Shane’s words from earlier.

Shane gently takes the top off, a confused expression crinkling across his nose and forehead. “Why is your mother’s necklace in here?”

Ilya reaches in and picks up the delicate gold chain, moving with deft fingers to fasten it around Shane’s neck, the crucifix settling just above Shane’s pectorals.

Still confused, Shane waits, his own fingers coming up to touch the new weight on his chest.

“I have worn this every day since she died,” Ilya says. “I took it from her neck at her viewing when no one was watching. I always feel like she is with me, protecting me when I wear it.”

“*Ilya*,” Shane whispers. He’s not aware he’s crying until he feels a tear streak down his face, followed by another, turning into a constant stream.

Ilya covers the crucifix with his hand, and Shane is sure he can feel his heart beating wildly. “But I do not need the protection anymore,” he goes on, his eyes latching onto Shane’s with an intensity that slows the world around them. “I am safe now.”

Breathing suddenly feels hard, but Shane manages a weak, “*Oh, fuck you, Rozanov.*”

Ilya just smiles fondly at him. “She would want you to have it now, I think. A piece of the person who loved me the most, with the one who loves me the most.”

“I love you,” Shane breathes, and it’s overwhelming how much he means it.

And then they’re stumbling towards the bed, all plans of not having sex flying out the window, because how could Shane possibly not feel the need to be completely consumed by Ilya?

They don’t take their time, they *can’t*, and as Ilya sinks into him with Shane biting at his shoulder to keep himself quiet, he knows they’ve been protecting each other the entire time they’ve known one another.

It’s looked different over time. Secrets and sex. Foundations and moves. Marriage and documents and necklaces.

He’s safe now, too. Has been since the very first time he’d stepped into that hotel room at nineteen years old, because there is no better safety than the circle of Ilya Rozanov’s arms.

And as they lay in the after math, sated and sickeningly in love, Shane knows the gifts they give each other transcend material *things*. They deepen their connection, an ever expanding ocean they’ll spend their whole lives exploring. Together.

He places a kiss on top of Ilya’s head, cradling him close. “Merry Christmas, Ilya.”

Ilya squeezes him and breathes softly into his neck, “Merry Christmas, Shane.”

## End Notes

Merry Christmas to everyone who's celebrating ❤️

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!