The One Where Shane Tries Shuba

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The One Where Shane Tries Shuba

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Summary

Shane is curious about what it would be like to celebrate a Russian Christmas, and Ilya delivers.

Notes

TW: mentions of mental health, depression, Irina Rozanova's death

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

"What does Russian Christmas look like?" Shane asks suddenly, staring into the crackling embers of the fire in the fireplace.

Ilya turns towards him, his brows furrowing curiously, "Same as here, only more snow." He says briefly, flicking through a page of one of Shane's boring hockey books.

Both him and Hollander have chosen to spend the holidays at Shane's cottage outside of Ottawa. Although the cottage normally serves as a summer retreat during their off-season, Shane had thought it would be a nice getaway from the usual hustle of their regular season.

It was beautiful in the winter time as much as it was in the summer. They've finally gotten use out of the fireplace, and the landscape beyond the enormous window changed with every hour as a sun set early in the evenings. The evening forecast predicted snow later in the week, and Ilya was secretly excited to see the evergreen trees topped with snow like they were back in Russia.

Shane laughs, gently kicking Ilya's foot where their legs had been intertwined on the couch, "Not what I meant." He says, "Like, what is that you guys do? Or are you just as grey and miserable as any other day of the year?"

Ilya kicks him back playfully, "You're the boring one here, Shane, not me."

Shane gets up from his side of the couch and crawls over the length of Ilya's body and rests his chin on his chest, his big brown eyes staring up into Ilya's. The reflection of the fire's flames shown clearly in his eyes and Ilya couldn't help but press his lips to Shane's temple, watching as blush crept up into his cheeks and flushing his freckles.

Ilya tosses the book aside and runs a tender hand through Shane's hair, "Hmmm." He ponders, thinking back to his time as a boy back in Russia, where the nights were long and the cold would seep into your bones. Him and Andrei had not yet learned to resent each other, but that did not stop them from getting into petty fights and arguments over spilled milk or a broken toy.

Their mother, Irina, would come between them and pull them apart like fighting cats, and force them to see eye to eye. Ilya wondered, had she been alive even now, would he and Andrei still be brothers?

"Hey?" Shane asks, pulling Ilya away from his memories, "Did I lose you there for sec?"

Ilya's eyes refocus and he sees Shane, with a half-smile on his lips, "A little." He admits, "Was thinking of *mama*."

Shane's smile drops and his face is suddenly downcast, "Oh, Ilya, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked. I was just curious, y'know? It's just... Christmas is this week and I was wondering since my parents are on vacation that we could do something together..." His voice trails as

Ilya's lips find his. They can't help but slip into their familiar rhythm, with Ilya's tongue sneaking into Shane's mouth and Shane letting the smallest sigh escape between kisses.

Ilya breaks first, "It was good memories. Christmas was good with mama. She always makes everything, house would be warm..." He trails, letting himself go back to that time, before things had gotten worse with his father and brother, when his mother was alive and smiling and looking as beautiful as she always was, "... and family would come, lots of cousins and uncles and aunties, they drink and eat and we children would play and make mess."

Shane laughs, painting his own picture of what mischief younger Ilya would've been up to while the adults weren't looking, "What would she do?"

Ilya's mind immediately transports back to his childhood home's kitchen, with the slightly yellowed wallpaper and smell of dill and cabbage that seemed to permeate every surface. He remembers Mama chopping boiled carrots, the steam of them still floating up into the air as she chopped with a knife that had been sharpened so many times it resembled a scimitar more than it did a knife, but it got the job done. He would steal pieces off the tired wooden cutting board when her back was turned, until she would start chopping the pickled herring.

At the time, he'd never had it before, just seen it standing in a crystal bowl on the holiday table from years past, only consumed by the adults at the party. He'd thought it was a very grown-up dish to eat, and in that moment he felt *very* grown up. When next his mother's back was turned, he'd steal a cube of the oily fish and pop it into his mouth. What immediately followed was the horrified retching of a child that had no idea what they'd just put into their mouth.

"Ilya!" His mother exclaimed, worried first that he was choking on something, but as soon as she put a hand in front of his mouth and he'd coughed up the cube of herring, her worry turned into laughter, the most beautiful sound, "S*el'd'*, Ilyusha, next time don't put your mouth where it does not belong."

"We make *shuba.*" Ilya says to Shane, "Just like how *mama* made it."

"*Shuba.*" Shane turned the word over in his mouth, "Shoo-bah" he says playfully, "What exactly is *shuba*?"

Ilya thought back to assembling the monstrosity in a clingfilm-lined cake mold; first came a layer of boiled grated beets, then smearing on a layer of mayonnaise, then the layer of shredded or finely chopped carrots, then the dreaded herring, onions sprinkled over the herring, and finally, boiled potatoes sometimes tossed with dill. This beast of a dish would then be sealed and rested in the fridge for a few hours, then inverted onto a decorative plate and presented at the holiday table. To garnish, he remembers chopping chives or parsley, as if dressing it with few green leaves would make the food look any more inviting.

"Herring under a fur coat." Ilya says to Shane, wheeling a squeaky shopping cart through a busy Eastern European grocery store, "That is what *shuba* means."

Shane chuckles at his side, "How'd you guys fit all those words into one?"

Ilya shot him a glare that turned into a grin, "You're funny, you know that right?"

Is this the only Russian grocery store in all of Canada? Ilya thought to himself, *the entirety of the Russian population must be here.*

The store teemed with the familiar words, phrases, and smells that Ilya often forgot about when he spent too much time in the west. This supermarket was not only Russian, but also carried other familiar goods from across Eastern Europe like Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania... Ilya couldn't help but smile when he saw a bottle of his favorite childhood juice, the memory of its flavor washing over him.

Shane seemed... out of place among the crowds of small Eastern European women with their intricately embroidered scarves and carts overflowing with ingredients and food to prepare for the holiday table. He stuck closely to Ilya, falling step-in-step with him as Ilya navigated them through the busy aisles and excusing them through the bands of customers that waited for their number to called at the deli counter.

"We also take a couple other things for the holiday table." Ilya tells Shane, "Give you a *real* taste of Russia."

Shane couldn't help but notice a slightly evil glimmer in Ilya's eye, one that even Ilya could sense himself, "Don't worry, I won't poison you, yet."

Ilya reaches into one of the open refrigerated display cases of packaged foods and comes away with a small container of, "*Olivier"* he says to Shane who looks at the container curiously.

"I perhaps forgot to mention that Russian Christmas is... what is the word? *Incompatible* with the *Shane Diet.*" Ilya jokes, putting the *olivier* into the cart.

Shane smiles, "I kind of figured... But if this is the kind of food that fueled you all the way through to being Olympic captain, I might just change my regiment."

Ilya couldn't help but smile and discreetly slid a hand down Shane's back, giving him a brief but flirty squeeze of his ass, "You wish, Hollander."

They stroll around the store picking up some odd items here and there, sometimes stopping for Ilya to explain to Shane the significance of a particular brand of yogurt or cracker that he'd grown up eating, or to enlighten Shane on nuanced Russian and Slavic traditions by the way a certain dish is served or presented.

And Shane would listen with great intensity, much to Ilya's surprise. He'd pick things off of shelves or point them out for Ilya to explain or translate, asking questions about whether Ilya liked or disliked the particular thing, to describe what it tastes like or what it was made from... Questions that Ilya realized came from the deeply rooted care that Shane has for him, the same as he does for Shane.

In Ilya's quest to distance himself as much as possible from Russia, he realized that in the process he'd forgotten all the things that he *loved.* His family and country might have made

him miserable, but they are a part of who he is, where he comes from, and what built him into the professional hockey player and passionate lover that he is today. Without them, he would not have met Shane and learned to love him. Without him, Ilya might have found himself in a deeply dark place, perhaps the dark place that his mother was in before...

"Yo, Ilya, what's with the baby?" Shane asks, snapping Ilya back into reality. He stood in the candy aisle, holding a packet of chocolates wrapped in patterned paper and the distinctive face of a baby that Ilya has had seared into his memory, "That's *Alenka,* a brand of chocolates."

Shane laughs, "Sweet, I'm getting some."

Back at the cottage, Shane and Ilya take time to organize their haul of groceries in the fridge. Ilya took great pride in having some of his childhood food inside the fridge beside Shane's dietician-curated meal plans. Ilya anticipates that by the end of the holiday break, they won't want to stomach their regular season diets. He certainly won't want to go back to kale and microgreens, whatever *those* were.

"When are we making the shoo-bah?" Shane asks in a playfully exaggerated accent, "I'm dying to see how this turns out."

Ilya tosses him the beets they'd purchased earlier and commands him to peel them, "Make sure you rinse them before you peel."

The kitchen fills with the familiar smell of his mother's cooking, and he thinks back to stealing those carrots and having herring for the first time. Now as he cut into the oily and salty fish, he steals himself a small piece. Initially grimacing, he acclimates to the flavor quickly and realizes that despite the years of resentment, he's actually grown fond of the taste.

"Oh god." He hears Shane say in shock, "Did you just eat that?"

Ilya puts another piece in his mouth, just to prove a point, "Yes, and soon you will too. I will peel the potatoes soon."

When Ilya instructed Shane to cube the carrots and potatoes, he was alarmed to see just how *perfect* those cubes would be.

"Ok Mr. Perfectly-cubed-carrots." Ilya playfully mocks him as he himself hacked at the beets, their pink juices splashing all over the cutting board.

Shane nudges him with his hip, "It's all about presentation." He says haughtily, "And the recipe online said you were supposed to grate those, not chop them."

"Oh, did *mama* tell you that?" Ilya responds, equally as mocking, "Didn't think so."

Shane nudges him again, "Trying to do your mom's recipe justice."

"She would be so happy no matter how we made it." Ilya says, a certain rawness suddenly wavering in his voice. *How proud would she be?* He thought, *She would've loved Shane, and she would've loved having Shane in the kitchen with her.*

Shane continued to contently cube the potatoes and Ilya began prepping the mold. Shane did not have this kitchen stocked with a cake mold, but Ilya improvised with a bowl. He lined it with clingfilm and set to work spreading and arranging the ingredients, imagining how his mother's hands would have done so. Looking down, watching himself spread and flatten the ingredients into their shape, he realizes just how much his hands look like his mother's; strong and sturdy, yet delicate and gentle. Perhaps he takes after his mother in other ways too, like the way his eyes crinkle when he smiles, or how his ears turn red when he feels embarrassed (which very rarely happens), how he has the same nervous tics as she did like picking at his nails or tapping his foot to a certain rhythm. His mother was still with him, in every way, and now, into the *shuba* he feels like she is right there with them in Shane's kitchen, filling the room with the same joy and warmth that Ilya remembers from his childhood with her.

The last of the ingredients are sealed into the dish and away it goes to the fridge to set.

"What about everything else?" Shane asks, motioning with this chin towards the fridge filled with the Russian feast.

"Tomorrow." Ilya says, drying his hands and coming up behind Shane to hold him, "We eat tomorrow." He kisses the back of Shane's neck, and he feels the other man shiver from the contact.

"Y'know..." Shane says, turning to face Ilya and wrapping his arms around his neck, "Being with you today, in the Russian supermarket, watching you be so... polite and proper in Russian, was kinda hot." Shane's face immediately reddens at the confession, but his eyes flicker between Ilya's eyes and lips.

Ilya presses his mouth into Shane's neck and hums, "Mmm, you liked that?" Shane nods. Ilya trails kisses up Shane's neck and along his jaw before taking his mouth.

After a few seconds of kissing, Shane begins to laugh and they're forced to break. Ilya, already slightly aroused and confused, asks, "What? What is so funny?"

"You taste like herring." Shane says, trying to go back in for a kiss, but now Ilya has become conscious of the fact that the taste still lingered in his mouth, "Oh shit, sorry, I will drink some water or something."

Shane shakes his head, pulling Ilya closer, "No no, it's okay, it gives me a taste for what's to come."

Chapter 2

The next day, Shane and Ilya spent it outside. The surrounding landscape of the cottage had become enveloped in snow overnight and more of it fell delicately throughout the day.

They spent the day wrestling in the fresh white powder, taking advantage of its softness to tumble and roll like the boys they still were at heart. Somewhere along the way, Shane had the idea to build a snowman, and as they collected the soft snow to pat into the snowman's individual segments, Ilya taught him short Russian phrases.

"*Schastlivogo Rozhdestva!*" Ilya irritably, "*Merry. Christmas.* Hollander!"

But Shane continued to playfully turn the words over, "Too many syllables!" He'd complain.

"And how would you say it in French?" Ilya asks, with his back turned and pressing snow into his palms.

"*Joyeux Noël!*" Shane said, pride laced in his perfect French-Canadian pronunciation.

Ilya turns, the perfect snowball in his grasp, "Too many syllables my ass!" and he lets the snowball loose, aiming it right for one of Shane's cheeks.

The other man yelps in surprise and rubs the sore spot on his left ass cheek before turning with an evil grin, "You *asshole*! Game on!"

They fight again, launching loose snowballs at each other and kicking up the snow to deflect each other's attacks. The surrounding woods, once peaceful and tranquil, were filled with the profanities and dirty talk of hockey's biggest rivals. But in the end, when they were both spent and exhausted, they fell back into a fresh patch of snow and held one another as their breathing returned to normal.

"I love you." Shane says in the quiet, "I know we say that more now, but it never has any less meaning than the first time we said it."

"*Ya tebya lyublyu*. I love you too, Shane." Ilya says back, looking at Shane with his rosy cheeks and mussed up hair, his hat lost somewhere in the snow from when Ilya pulled it off mid-snowball-fight.

They return inside and shower together, enveloping themselves in the warmth of the water and in each other, occasionally kissing through the steam.

Ilya couldn't help himself and turns Shane against the wall of the shower, wrapping his arm around him and finding his already erect cock taut in his grasp. Shane whimpers his approval at the contact and allows Ilya to run his hand up and down his length. The shower fills with their quickening breath, both seeking the release they love to provide each other.

"No... Not yet." Shane whispers, and Ilya could feel he was close. Shane turns around to face him again, his eyes hooded and drunk with lust, envelopes both of their dicks in his grasp and begins to move in slow agonizing strokes. Ilya nearly stumbles at the sensation, bracing himself against the wall of the shower as Shane worked. Ilya's head falls onto Shane's shoulder, muttering incoherent words of pleasure.

"*Fuck* Shane." Ilya manages to say, his voice sluggish. He could feel himself teetering over the edge of his own orgasm, but he doesn't want to come too quickly, not when it feels so good. To have Shane jerking them both off in the steamy heat of the shower, looking beautifully flushed with arousal. He doesn't realize he's staring at Shane, but Shane grins a little between breaths, "You like what you see?" with an edge in his voice.

Ilya nods, sloppily kissing him, his cheeks, his jaw, his neck, "I *love* what I see." He says, sucking on a small bit of skin on Shane's neck between his teeth.

"F-F-Fuck!" Shane drawls out, "Fuck me..." They were both dangerously close, and Shane's movements started to become erratic, chasing the peak of their orgasms.

"No time." Ilya rasps, "I won't make it." He could feel his pulse in his ears with how hard he was struggling not to cum instantly. He wraps his free hand around their dicks, working a finger between them. Shane lets out an erotic *Fuck* at the extra contact, and this was enough to take Ilya to the point of no return.

Ilya comes, *hard,* his ears flooding with the sounds of his and Shane's moans as he is ripped apart with pleasure. Every muscle tenses aside from their dicks, both pulsating with the shock of their orgasm. Ilya feels Shane involuntarily bucking into their hands, riding the wave of his own orgasm and gripping onto Ilya's back with his free hand to keep from buckling. Shane's nails scraping his back added another layer of pleasure he was astounded to find he enjoyed.

He himself, did not realize, that he'd stifled his moans by sinking his teeth into Shane's shoulder, but he did not seem to notice.

The stream from the shower washed them away, leaving them thoroughly clean in the afterglow.

Shane is the first to speak, "You *bit me."* his voice breathy.

"Only because you are so delicious." Ilya says, glancing at the bite mark left behind in his skin, "You *scratched* me." He says in retaliation, but his own voice came quiet and thick from arousal.

Shane doesn't say anything, his darkened eyes flicking between Ilya's eyes, lips, and chest. He kisses him, slowly, and Ilya feels another flutter arousal beginning to stir but he refrains from touching, still feeling incredibly sensitive.

"Let's get out before all the hot water is used up." Shane says, giving one last chaste kiss on Ilya's forehead before slipping out from under him to rinse himself once more and turning off the water.

Chapter 3

Ilya, admittedly, walked on gelatinous legs the rest of the day. He surprised even himself with how hard he was able to come, just from stroking himself and Shane off. It almost *terrifies* him how much Shane turns him on. They spent more time admiring how the snow fell outside and stoking the fire they'd kept relighting every evening.

They felt the pangs of hunger in the evening, lounging by the fire and lazily playing a game of chess.

"Let's eat, we don't even know all the rules of this game." Ilya says, thinking about the food they had stashed in the fridge.

"Yes we do! Well... *I do.*" Shane gloats, getting up from off the floor. He extends a hand to Ilya and helps him up.

In the kitchen, Ilya sets to work warming up some of the choice foods they'd acquired in the microwave or on the stove and Shane set the table. Within thirty minutes, they had a mini spread of Ilya's childhood Russian Christmas food, and the sight of it all on the table between them, with Shane smiling and admirably taking a picture of it on his phone, filled his chest with an indescribable amount of love.

"Where is the shoo-bah?" Shane asks, "Shoo-d you do the honors?"

"Ha-Ha." Ilya mock laughs, but returns to the fridge to find their mold of *shuba* exactly as they had left it the night before. He inverts it onto a plate and carefully removes the bowl. Each distinctive layer of Slavic flavor remained intact as he gently peeled away the cling film, careful not to disrupt the layers. He walks it over to their table and presents it, albeit exaggeratedly, "*Shuba!"*

Shane ducks to look at each of the layers, counting with the tines of his fork each layer of vegetables they'd worked together on cubing and shredding, "So do we like... cut into it like a cake?"

Ilya takes the nearest knife and cuts into it carefully, carving out a piece of it and serving it to Shane, and then for himself. They both sit at the table, the light of the room low and almost romantic, each a little intimidated to take a bite.

"I will be brave and taste test first." Ilya says, seeing the fear in Shane's eyes. He cuts into it with the side of his fork and brings it up to his lips and takes it.

He is immediately transported back to his childhood kitchen, but he was older now, and helping his mother with the cubing and cutting. Then, the memory shifts to when he's at the table, with his brother across from him, and they both have piled their plates high with food, including the *shuba* he'd helped his mother make earlier that day. The room was warm, and there was laughter from everyone. That day, even his usually cruel father had spared him and

his mother from misery and actually *complimented* her on a job well done for their holiday meal. That was the last Christmas he'd had with his mother.

"It is good." Ilya says, "Just like how *mama* would make it."

Shane took a bite of his own, and his face shifted between confusion, to thoughtfulness, to a small grin.

Ilya waited with bated breath for Shane's reaction, but the man just kept *eating*, which had to be the highest compliment of all.

"So?" He asks impatiently, taking more onto his own fork.

Shane nods as he continues to chew, "I can definitely see that it is an… acquired taste, but I can say that I actually like this."

Ilya's heart sang and a dumbest grin spread wide across his whole face; it was as if the sun shined directly onto their dinner table and filled the room with light and warmth.

He couldn't help but think of his mother, beaming at them both.

"I don't think I've seen you this happy since you won the Stanley cup." Shane teased, spooning some *olivier* and *pelmeni* onto his plate.

"I am happy that you like it." Ilya says simply, stifling himself from all the *I love you's* that would spill out if he didn't.

They spent the evening talking over food, Shane occasionally responding to messages from his parents who complimented their spread with emojis and a selfie of them both drinking from coconuts with swirly straws and a mini umbrella sticking out.

At the end of the night, they cleaned up and put away any leftovers, already looking forward to tomorrow's dinner.

Ilya was the first to fall onto the couch, with Shane following shortly thereafter and finding his place in Ilya's arms. With a belly full of his favorite food, Shane in his arms, and enveloped in the warmth of memories he cherished most, Ilya couldn't help but hum happily.

"Merry Christmas, Shane." He says, giving him a kiss on his temple.

"Christmas isn't for a couple days." Shane says, lazily rubbing Ilya's thigh.

"I know." Ilya says, "But today is the best Christmas ever."

End Notes

A/N:
- Everything I know about hockey is from this show/book! Please pardon any inaccuracies.
- This takes place post Heated Rivalry but pre-Long Game.
- Everything I know about Russian/Slavic culture is because I, the author, am Slavic and am familiar with many traditions - there may be some inaccuracies as every culture and family has their own way of celebrating holidays.

Thank you for reading and enjoying my fic! Your feedback is greatly appreciated!

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