The First of Many

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The First of Many

by OlyaMolya26

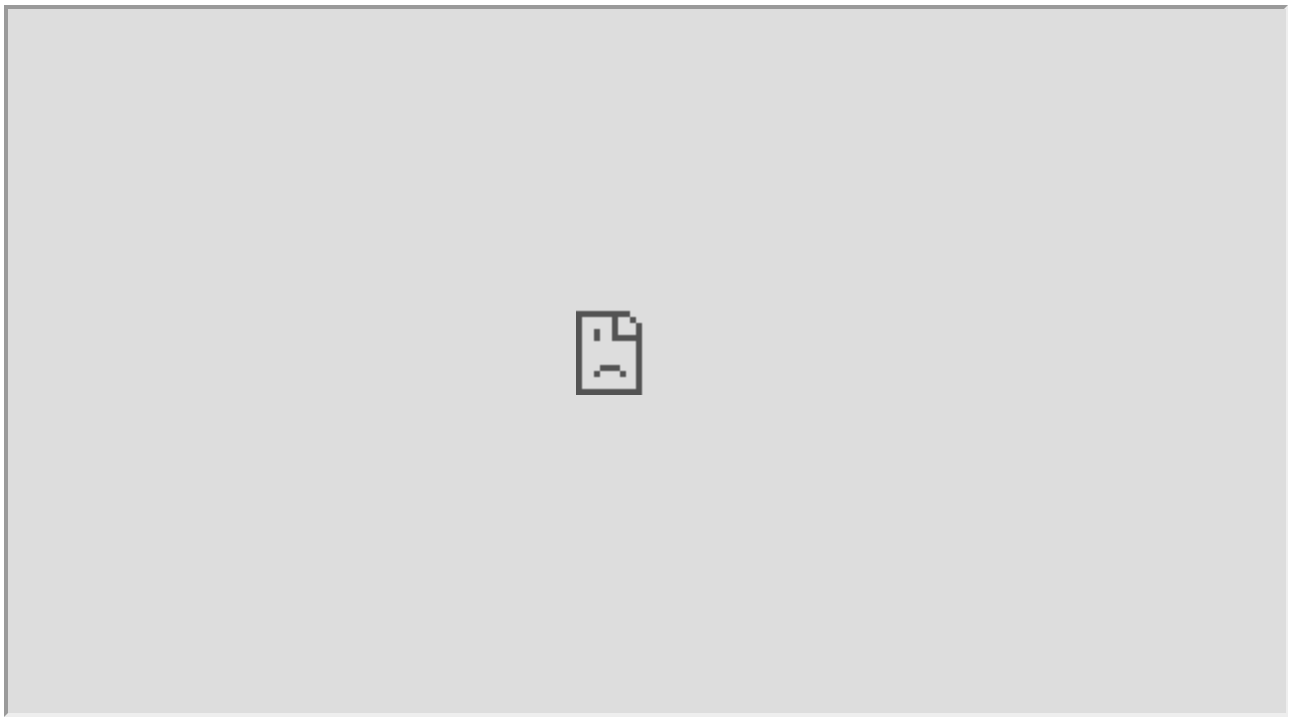
Summary

Their first Christmas as husbands is small and unremarkable by the world’s standards - a quiet house, winter outside the windows, too much food, familiar teasing, and no one to hide from. Between decorating the tree, exchanging thoughtful gifts, and counting down to the New Year, they settle into the gentle reality of it being just the first of many holiday seasons they will spend together as a family.

Notes

The canon for this fic is the show's version of events and characters, but everything from Long Game that doesn't contradict the show - has happened as well.

See the end of the work for more notes



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23 December 2021

“И мне опять снился сон.” *(And I had a dream again)*

“The one about your mother?” asked Galina in Russian.

“Yes, but this time it was the other way around.” Continued Ilya in Russian as well. “Me and Shane were inside the house and she was outside, behind the window, smiling at us. And then I ran towards the door but couldn't open it no matter how hard I tried. So, what does that mean?”

“What do you think it means?”

“I don’t know. That I miss my mom. That I wished Shane could meet her. But it’s just, I don't know, everything in my life now is GREAT. Like, finally everything feels just right. We are even winning on ice. Together! We go out with friends and, I don’t know, fucking holding hands in public. And yet I still dream about my dead mom. And yet sometimes I wake up just numb. My beautiful husband is sleeping peacefully next to me and here I am, just sulking.

And I don't even know what about. I just want to be fucking normal and fix this." Ilya rubbed his face in exasperation.

"Well, we've talked about that. Remember the injury metaphor - in a situation where you have to push through the pain - your brain shuts it down not to notice it until you can address it. And your psyche does the same with trauma. So it's only natural that now, when everything in your life is finally so stable your mind is allowed to let go. And yes, all this unaddressed trauma is going to be pouring in like wave after wave. And that's why you're here. We are not "fixing" anything, we're trying to ride the ways without being sucked under and finally heal. The worst part - reaping off the bandaid - is behind us and it's the biggest step. Now you are pouring alcohol on an open wound to cleanse it so to speak, of course it is going to hurt. After years and decades of emotional trauma, happiness would seem like an attack to the system." She paused and looked at Ilya waiting for him to say something to that.

"Well I don't know, how much more time do I need to finally get used to being happy? Because apparently a few years of bliss isn't doing anything."

"Were the last few years blissful for you?"

"Well there were ups and downs and it wasn't fairytale perfect but we and Shane were together and, I don't know."

"But you weren't though. The relationship was a secret. You were living in different cities." She looked pointedly at him as if to urge him to continue the train of thought of all of the things Ilya might find wrong in his and Shane's relationship. He got defensive instead.

"Well yeah, but we both had decided that it's the way to go and it worked out in the end."

"What you consciously decide and what you subconsciously feel about it doesn't have to match. Did you FEEL like you were blissfully enjoying the situation?"

"Well no, but I'm not stupid, I'm not expecting to go through important life events loving every second of it, big achievements don't come to you easily, I would fucking know, I'm a professional athlete. So even if it was tough it was worth it, we wouldn't be where we are today otherwise."

"Yes, it is all true, but this truth can coexist with the fact that being in that situation was also hurting you, adding another trauma on top of everything. And more importantly just being closeted wasn't the only traumatic thing that you and Shane had gone through together throughout the years. So if you think about it, you've been truly blissfully happy without any worries for like what, half a year? Give yourself some time."

Ilya sighed heavily.

"I just don't want to mess it up. We've been trying to get to this place for so long, and for the majority of our relationship it seemed impossible that we'll ever get to have this. And I want to enjoy it for 100%, I want to be present and I want it to be perfect. We've deserved it."

"Have you talked to Shane about this?"

“Yes. As you’ve told me to, I’m trying to be more open about this stuff with him.”

“And how did it go?”

“Shane was sweet. Then cried a bit, worrying that he’s projecting his perfectionism onto me and that because of him I feel pressured in our relationship. Which is complete bullshit by the way, told him as much.”

They had beautiful passionate sex after that, Ilya being emotionally vulnerable made Shane all hot and bothered for some reason. Kinky perv. Ilya wasn’t complaining, that was a great motivation to keep doing the therapy thing. He wouldn’t say that to Galina of course.

“Well while we are on the topic of you following through with what we’re discussing here - how about your home task? Any new hobbies?”

“Ugh, it’s difficult, I don’t really have much time. But,” he thought for a second, “oh, I bought a PC! I only ever had laptops, easier for work travel and stuff, but figured if I don’t get to have fancy sports cars I can go all in with building a sick set up. So I have like two monitors and neon lights everywhere and state-of-the-art components. I can't wait for the days off to start so I can finally play Cyberpunk. We are staying together in *our* house in Ottawa for the whole Christmas holiday, only the two of us for the first time, so it’s a perfect opportunity to have a me-time I guess.”

It was partly true. They were going to spend Christmas by themselves indeed. Shane insisted. “It’s our first Christmas as a married couple, I want it to be special,” he said. Ilya doubted he was going to be interested in anything else beyond Shane in those 3 days though. And because the New Year’s Eve game with Pittsburg was postponed, they were free on 31st and were coming over to David and Yuna’s place to celebrate at least the New Year together.

“Oh and I’ve also been listening to a lot of Russian music lately.” He remembered.

“Oh?” Galina didn’t seem surprised, as per usual, her reactions were always there just to make Ilya keep talking.

“It’s not like a hobby really, I listen to it while I’m doing something else, but it feels new nonetheless, or rather nostalgic, cause if I do listen to something Russian it’s mostly the old stuff. I was really into Russian rap when I was a young teen, but when I started going abroad I wanted to be as cool as the other kids and be on the same page with everyone so I started listening to only English songs. And then I was never really homesick, I dreaded returning back home, especially after meeting Shane and knowing that there is no place I’d rather be than next to him. So I never felt like watching or listening to anything Russian.”

“Do you feel homesick now hence the change?”

“There is no *home* in Russia for me to miss. But I can’t deny that I wish I could at least visit the place. I haven’t been there for years and it’s out of the question now, of course, I’ve seen some nasty articles and comments from Russian media and fans. I hate it. But at the same time I can’t hate the place where I was born, it’s part of me, for better or for worse. I know that technically I cooooould visit if I reeeeeeally wanted to, I have connections, it’s not like I

would be arrested the second I step foot there. But I keep imagining how one day me and Shane could be kissing on Red Square right next to the Kremlin in Moscow, and then walk down Nevsky Prospect in Saint-Petersburg, holding hands, and no one would bat an eye. I want that for me and Shane. I want that for my country as well to be honest. The freedom. And I'm in no mood to settle for anything less for our first visit to my home country. But alas it's just a dream for now and I'm left to just listen to the music and talk Shane's ears off about my childhood growing up in Russia."

"That sounds nice, that you can share this part of you with him."

"He's more eager about that than I am to be honest" Ilya smiled sweetly remembering how Shane would give him his whole undivided attention the second Ilya would drop some lore about his life back in Russia.

"And how is Shane's progress with learning Russian?"

"Good. Much better than mine with the citizenship test preparation."

Ilya was officially a Permanent Resident in Canada and in July that year he finally met the minimum requirement of living in the country for 3 years. So he was getting ready to apply for citizenship. Shane saw him studying Canadian law and history and decided that he had to step it up with his own lessons. Him diligently studying Russian was actually the main reason Ilya also got sucked in by everything Russian all of the sudden lately. Shane made them watch Russian films together, he didn't understand most of it but loved the sound of the language. So Ilya would whisper the translation in Shane's ear and explain cultural things in the film that Shane didn't get. No matter what they would watch though Shane would get horny by the end and then Ilya would talk him through an orgasm or two speaking only in Russian. That was their new kink to add to the rotation. But he didn't want to admit to any of that to his therapist, the whole point of the hobby thing was to have something other than Shane in his life that he's interested in, but Ilya wasn't sure he really wanted that. He finally had someone who he can share everything with, he wanted to enjoy this.

"Well our time is up unfortunately, so we'll continue with that next time" she looked at him the way that said Ilya his thoughts didn't go unnoticed. *Mind reader.*

"Yeah, well, Happy New Year to you, see you in 2022."

"Thank you. You too. Have a great Christmas break."

The second he closed the office door behind himself he fished his muted phone out of his pocket. There was a message from Shane sent 15 minutes ago "I'm parked next to a pharmacy, facing Carling Avenue😘" Ilya smiled and rushed outside to see his sweetest husband.

"Jeez, it's getting chilly." he said, getting into the car.

"Yeah no shit, maybe it's also because you are in just an overcoat over a turtleneck in the middle of winter?" Shane looked at him with his eyebrows all frowny.

“Well why bother with the winter coat when it’s just barely below zero degrees and I knew you’re picking me up so I wanted to look hot for my man.” Shane gave him a glare. He himself was in a puffer jacket and with a hat on. And glasses, he needed them for driving now too. Cute. Ilya left a sweet peck on the corner of Shane’s mouth before the latter could say anything.

“Mm, do I taste coffee?”

“Yeah”

“Did you get me some?”

“Yes.” Shane reached for the paper bag on the backseat and handed Ilya a huge Timmies seasonal latte with extra whipped cream and Christmas sprinkles. Ilya couldn’t believe his eyes.

“Wow. Not even a lecture on how unhealthy this is?”

“It’s a lost cause anyway so why just not let you enjoy it.”

“Who are you and what did you do with my husband?”

“Fuck off.”

“Oh, there he is!”

Shane was smiling while shaking his head and already stirring the wheel to get out of the parking lot. They were headed to a Christmas Tree farm a bit outside of the city. David had offered to get them a tree the same day he and Yuna were going to get theirs but Shane was adamant about getting it together with Ilya. In less than an hour's drive they were at the destination. It was a cute wooden cottage with all the christmassy decor imaginable at a quite picturesque countryside location. It would have been perfect if there was a bit more snow though to Ilya’s liking. The air was frosty indeed, but no snowflakes in sight. *Sigh*. Ilya kinda missed Russian’s minus 25 and snowdrifts up to his knees. His mom had loved winter, he remembered how she was pulling him on a sled-

“Ilya, what do you think?” Shane was looking at him expectedly with his polite face he put on every time he interacted with service workers.

“Huh?” Ilya noticed a lanky man standing next to them in a uniform that is best described as Santa’s Elves’.

“Oliver,” Shane gestured his hand at the man, “the manger here, the one I had called in advance, wants us to go on a tour to choose the perfect fir tree."

“Yeah, yeah, that’s why we’re here. Lead the way, Oliver!” all that was said while Ilya’s hand was landing on its rightful place on Shane’s lower back.

“It’s such an honour to be hosting the both of you,” Oliver shook Ilya’s free hand, “please, follow me.” and they did.

They were walking down the main path of the fields. “So here we have Fraser Fir, it has short, soft needles, strong branches, green foliage with a silvery underside, pleasant scent and best needle retention. Other there we have Balsam Fir, soft needles, fair branch strength, dark shiny green foliage, most fragrant and excellent needle retention. This way we have Scotch Pine, it has-” Ilya tuned out all the boring details he cared zero amount about. The place was beautiful. Row after row of fir trees and walking paths looking more like a park rather than a farm. Shane was making his cute concentrated face looking around. Mmm, his glasses were still on. Hot. Ilya was freezing so he put his hand in Shane’s jacket pocket and was walking closer to him. Shane put his hand in his pocket too and squeezed Ilya’s freezing one while listening to the very animated shop manager.

“I don’t even know,” Shane did look confused, “all of them are pretty, I’m at a loss, Ilya, what do you think?”

Ilya looked at the manager. “Which one is the most expensive?”

“Uhm, well, eh there’s a 9′ tall Fraser/Balsam cross in the field over there.”

“We’ll take it, thanks”.

“Ilya…”

“What, the price is the highest because it’s the best, I’m not a botanist, I don't care. It’s beautiful, right? So we’ll take it.”

“Let’s see it first at least.” Shane had his *come on now* look.

“Would you like to use one of our Christmas wagons to get to the location? The blankets and coco are included.” Shane and Ilya exchanged bemused looks at the manager's offer.

They obviously walked to the location. Thankfully the tree was indeed amazing.

“Wow” said Shane in awe.

“Great!” Ilya clapped his hand for dramatic effect. “You love it, I love it, that’s our Christmas tree right there.”

“Mm-hmm, our first.” Shane’s eyes got glossy and he was looking at the tree as mesmerized.

“Simp.”

“Fuck you.”

“Aww, what a way to ruin the moment.” Ilya put his arm around Shane’s shoulder grinning from ear to ear.

“Do you want to cut down the tree yourself?” the manager cut in.

“Eh? Not really,” said Ilya. “What’s this, a Hallmark movie? Should I have put on some suspenders and a lumberjack flannel?” said Ilya playfully, turning to Shane. “That’s what you

wanted, *honey*, for me to chop some wood in front of you?" Shane snickered but blushed as well. That's a double win.

"We actually do rent our farm to Hallmark as a filming location, you might have seen us in some." chimed in the manager.

"Yeah, nuh, I doubt that." Ilya wanted to go home already to be honest.

"We'll take the tree, what about the transportation, everything is provided? We definitely can't transport it in our car. And do you install it? And also-" Shane was bombarding the poor guy with endless logistics questions. Satisfied with every question answered Shane signed all of the papers as they watched the tree being cut down and packed in some sort of protective net. Came Ilya's favourite part - he took out *their* conjoined RBC card to pay for the purchase. Before the wedding Yuna had gone through all the Ilya's horrendous finances and set him up with individual saving and investing accounts. And then after the wedding she helped him and Shane do all of the paperwork regarding future *conjugal* (whatever that word meant) property. Ilya was by no means poor but there was something so fucking sexy in using not just *his* money, but *theirs.* He felt like a sugarbaby. Sometimes he would use their card purely so Shane could get a notification on his phone saying "purchase at Wicked Wanda's went through successfully".

It was early afternoon and the tree would be delivered and Installed already in the evening (perks of being famous - you are at the top of every waiting list). So after getting back to their car they were on their way to the grocery store because, as that year it was only the two of them, they were going to do all of the cooking themselves. Roast Turkey is on the menu of course, "beef and ham would be too heavy" Shane had said as if there wasn't a bajillion other things they were gonna stuff their faces with. Though no David's signature Tourtière pie this year unfortunately, which made Ilya think whether the whole "Christmas by ourselves" thing was really worth it. Ilya's responsibility was the veggies, but he wouldn't let Mr Healthy Diet ruin his fun - all of the veggies were going to be maple-glazed.

They were pretty famous high-profile celebs but as much as it pained Ilya to admit it Shane was right - get a boring car and wear sportswear and no one would recognise you. Ilya liked to whip out his one and only sports car and rock an outrageous leopard-print see through silk shirt on occasions of some nighttime events but going shopping on a weekday was done much better the Shane's way. So they were done with everything in an hour without anyone paying them any attention (also god bless self check-out). Ilya presumed they were heading straight home (they could even go for a round or two before the christmas tree delivery he thought) until he noticed they turned the wrong turn.

"Are you kidnaping me?"

"We have an order at a bakery to pick up."

Ilya perked up at that. "We do?"

"Yeah, mom and dad are still on vacation so they can't make anything for us and I know we've decided to cook everything ourselves it's just that deserts are not my forte but you love them, so."

“Mm. Well. If we weren’t married I would go down on one knee at that, but as we already are I could do something else while on my knees later today.”

“And you say I’m easy. Should have just bought you a bunch of sweets years ago and you would have been mine.”

“I was yours even when you were feeding me brussel sprouts, that's how much I love you.”

Shane took his hand off the wheel and squeezed Ilya’s thigh a little.

“Careful,” Ilya smirked, “or we would need to park somewhere secluded.”

“No car sex. And no public sex.”

“You no fun.”

“I think you love it.”

“Can’t argue there.”

After the order pick up they got home within half an hour. Eh, now Shane definitely wouldn’t want to get frisky thinking about the delivery guys coming knocking on the door at any moment. Ilya continued unloading the groceries. At the bakery they’d got the most beautiful Bûche de Noël Ilya had ever seen. And it was pretty big. Nice. Ilya felt like a kid - couldn’t wait until Christmas day to eat all of the good food. Even now when he ate good food every day and his childhood memories being more about the Russian New Year’s celebration he still felt himself as giddy.

The delivery guys came in soon after Shane and Ilya were done with cleaning up the area in the living room for the Christmas tree. The whole thing took like 15 minutes to assemble and just like that the workers were gone leaving Shane and Ilya with a much more time consuming task of decorating. They put on Home Alone to play in the background and got to business. Shane had gone bonkers and somehow had managed to get a hold of soviet christmas ornaments somewhere. Ilya had cooed at the thoughtfulness and had decided not to mention that he in fact didn’t like those even as a kid. But now when he was putting them next to Shane’s family’s ones, on *their* Christmas tree they looked like they belonged. Christmas lights were on and everything felt magical. Ilya had this mushy feeling in his stomach again. After their wedding this sensation creeped up on him more and more often. He was becoming too soft.

After a lazy couch kissing session with Home Alone 2 forgotten in the background they went to bed and slowly took each other apart. One scorching shared bathtub later they were in bed fast asleep.

Christmas Eve 24 December 2021

“Mom?”

The door was finally opened but Ilya was stuck in the doorframe. He looked over his shoulder at Shane. He was smiling at him. He turned his head back to his mom. She was smiling too. No one was making any moves in any direction. What was Ilya supposed to do? He didn’t want to choose where to turn.

He woke up with a slight jolt. Thankfully Shane was still sound asleep. Ilya glanced at the bedside table alarm. Sighed. It was too early but he knew he wouldn’t be able to go back to sleep. He left the bed carefully and decided to use his free time to go on a walk with Anya and make some pancakes for breakfast.

They’ve spoiled the dog rotten but drew the line at allowing her into the bedroom. Shane was weird about it, “I don’t want her to see us going at it” he said, all the Ilya’s sane counter arguments about her being just a dog and not understanding anything and how cool it would be to cuddle the three of them in bed were shut down with a stern look and a rant about dog’s hair being everywhere. Ilya very wisely hadn’t pointed out that despite the length of it spaniels have fur and not hair. The compromise was that they could cuddle on the couch as much as their hearts desired. And it’s not like Anya was deprived of anything - she had like six dog beds around the house, different types as well. A big bolster bed in the living room next to the fireplace and one in her room (yes, she had a whole room to herself), a pillow bed in the dining area of the kitchen, an elevated one in the entrance hall, a donut bed in the study and a cave bed in the patio. She loved to keep them on their toes and was randomly choosing where to sleep each night. Today she was drawn to the one in the living room next to the newly installed Christmas tree. Good choice. She perked up as soon as she saw fully dressed Ilya coming down the stairs.

“Are you ready to go for a walk?” Anya immediately ran towards him and wiggled her tail, then dropped on her back to expose the belly “Who is the sweetest girl! What a cutie!” The cuteness aggression was Ilya’s biggest problem these days, both for the dog and for his husband. A very good problem to have.

Anya was dressed in her winter coat, she hated the booties so winter runs were always on the shorter side, and they headed out.

Returning back home there was no sign of Shane waking up so Ilya fed the dog and got to cooking. He put his earphones on and went to his usual playlist with a collection of very random liked songs. Not like Shane’s Spotify playlists. They were organised to the point of looking like something Patrick Bateman would do. Ilya usually didn’t really care what to listen to whereas Shane could become agitated if his nature sounds would miss a track with a specific type of rain in it. But this time Ilya did want to listen to something specific.

From Svetlana Ilya heard that Spotify had officially entered the Russian market, which meant a lot of artists were officially on the platform. He wanted something he used to listen to when he was younger and something wintery. He typed “Снег Идёт” in the search bar, the first result was exactly what he was looking for, the artist by the name Глюк'oZa. The music started and Ilya teleported to the beginning of 2005. He was thirteen, back in Russia. His mom had died less than a year before that and it was his first winter without her. He remembered how he first saw the music video to the song on TV. A 3D rendered cartoon of a

typical Russian neighborhood and the girl, the singer, playing with her doberman in the snow. He remembered crying, because his mom had promised him to buy a dog for that New Year. But she wasn't there to keep that promise.

Ilya glanced at Anya getting comfortable on her pillow bed and smiled. Well, he did have a dog now. He pulled himself from his thoughts and started cooking. The first batch of pancakes were done with "Russian New Year Songs Playlist" playing in his earphones, there were some old soviet songs from films, some more modern and fun ones, some romantic, by the time "Зимний Сон" by Алсу was playing two arms snaked around Ilya's midsection. He felt a kiss on his back and turned the music off by pulling the earphones out and putting them in his joggers' pocket, turning his face a little to see Shane.

"Hm, I felt the smell and came running. Jeez, how did I get this lucky with you?" Shane hugged Ilya harder and kept kissing his bare back between the shoulder blades. "I love you."

"I love you." Ilya turned in Shane's arms and kissed him tenderly on the lips. "Now sit, I have the last batch to finish and we'll eat."

Sizzling pancakes, Shane putting on some Christmas jazz on the speakers, Anya now enthusiastically playing with her new holiday plushy, is this what happiness is?

"So what is our plan for today?" Ilya asked while flipping the last pancake.

"Well, I want to do all the typical touristy things - Christmas market, ice skating, Parliament illuminations."

"So a corny date in the city center? On Christmas eve? Are you sure you want to go *this* public?"

"I'm sure. We are out. We are married. We live together and play on one team. Everyone who didn't get the memo can fuck off."

"Hahahaa well that's definitely true but still, we are kinda famous."

"All of the guys always hang out in public all the time."

"Yeah cause they don't have the whole city plastered with billboards of them in various states of undress."

Shane had the decency to blush.

"Don't get me wrong - I'm all for it." continued Ilya. "Just making sure it's really what you want to do. We can stay in."

"I'm sure."

They had their breakfast and precooked everything that was possible so that when they returned they could just pop everything in the oven and be done with it.

They put on thermal wear, reluctantly on Ilya's part “you don’t want to freeze to death, do you?” provided Shane. Long puffer coats, gloves, scarfs and hats were on, the dog was fed, again, and definitely fast asleep, and they were out of the door.

The drive to the city centre was pretty short, Shane started describing the plan the second he started the car. Ilya loved to be the passenger princes while they were using the boring car. Jingle Bell Rock was playing on the radio to set the mood.

“We are starting with the Christmas market, I want to buy something homemade. Maybe we can have a tradition of buying a new ornament each year? We can grab something to eat on the go. Then we’ll get to the embankment and skate the canal and finally get to the parliament to watch the Christmas lights. And after that hire a cab to get back to the car and get home right in time to prepare everything for the midnight meal. Sounds great?”

Of course Shane had a whole ass itinerary for a few hours in the most boring Canadian city like it’s not the same thing every year. But granted they hadn’t participated in anything public together as a couple, so it will be new and exciting to them.

“Sure, sounds fun!” answered Ilya beaming at Shane, taking his hand and kissing it.

They ditched their car at a paid underground parking lot and headed straight to the market. It was a nice chilly afternoon with snowflakes gently falling down finally covering the main streets in a much needed extra layer of snow.

The market was packed with families and tourists, in the mayhem of it all no one paid them any attention. They were walking down the stalls ogling the displayed trinkets. They did end up buying a very touristy but yet very beautiful maple leaf ornament Ilya liked. They walked around the market for a bit, taking photos to send to the family chat. They got to the eating area and there was something catching Ilya’s attention.

“Look, a shawarma food truck! Let’s grab a bite! I think the last time I’ve eaten one was in Moscow!” Him and Shane came closer to look at the menu.

”It looks like a big portion,” said Shane, studying the provided visualisation of the menu items, “maybe we get one plate for the two of us?”

”If you’ll eat your shawarma from a plate we are divorcing." Ilya didn’t give Shane a chance to protest and freed him from the pressure of choosing anything all together.

”Two beef sandwiches” as soon as Ilya’s order was taken he turned back to Shane, saying “Why do you people call them sandwiches is beyond me, it’s obviously a wrap.” Both of them stepped aside to let others order.

”A wrap would be with tortilla not with flatbread,” provided Shane.

”I’ve seen what you call flatbread and it’s not it either, it’s called lavash and you literally wrap it. And putting it on a plate is a crime against humanity.”

Their shawarma was ready pretty quickly, it was very nice, not as good as in Saint-Petersburg, but still. Ilya inhaled his in a few bites and was entertaining himself by looking at poor Shane trying to wrap his lips around the thing to have a bite. A bit of white sauce had accumulated in the corner of his mouth and Ilya as hypnotised reached with his thumb to wipe it. The next thing shellshocked Shane knew Ilya was licking the sauce from said thumb. Shane's whole face went red. His freckles looked especially pretty this way.

“Ilya…”

“I know, I know, behave myself, I’m trying, you are just too cute” he boobed Shane’s nose. “Can I kiss you?”

“Yes.” Shane breathed the answer out, already wetting his lips. The kiss was loving and very proper, Ilya didn’t want to spook Shane with too passionate PDA. But maybe he can pin Shane down against their car in the dark empty parking lot later.

That was exactly what he did and judging by Shane’s labored breathing he didn’t mind at all. They were back there to put the things they had bought at the market before heading out to the rink. Among other things Ilya had bought two ugly Christmas sweaters for him and Shane and was hell bent on wearing his one right away. Shane agreed to put his on only because he was getting chilly and unlike Ilya zipped his coat up to his chin so no one could see the very funny (in Ilya’s opinion) text on it - saying “Santa’s favourite ho”. Ilya’s sweater had Santa Claus on ice in a hockey uniform with the number 25 on it and holding a stick in his hands and it was proudly displayed for anyone to see with Ilya’s coat being wide open.

Every winter the Rideau Canal turned into the world's largest ice skating rink. It usually opened in January but that year there was a rare December launch. The winter was cold by the Canadian standards, just not very snowy. After walking for a bit to the embankment they found an empty bench to change into their ice skates which Shane had thoughtfully packed with them. They put their boots into shoesbags and then were already gliding effortlessly through the crowd. There were as many people as at the market, some in Christmas-related costumes, Ilya even saw someone dressed as a bear. There was an ice sculpture competition where people were using chainsaws to carve different statues and others were taking photos with the finished ones.

The rink was a huge open space with lots of people and even then two men holding hands skating fast by you would be noticeable. But both Ilya and Shane were in their element, it was impossible to keep it down. They were laughing, kissing, racing each other where there was enough space for it. Even if anyone did recognise them they were moving too fast for anyone to be able to approach them. It was perfect.

An hour or two of easily skating together holding hands a red and white sign caught Ilya’s attention. “Beaver tails! It’s a must!”

”We’ve just eaten!” Shane looked terrified at the prospect of eating something else on top of that shawarma, “I still can hardly breath, that thing was too filling. How can you even think about more food?!”

”It’s not food, it's a desert! You know how they say, there’s a separate stomach for such things.” Ilya didn’t wait for Shane to answer and skated straight to the queue.

“One Triple Trip please.” The order was taken and Ilya turned beaming to Shane.

“Jesus Ilya, now that I think about it, this whole time I should have been worried about you dying from diabetes and not lung cancer.” There were no people in line after them so they were chatting right next to the take away counter.

”Or, a crazy thought I know - you could have not worried about anything?”

”Impossible.”

”But surely it would take more than one pastry to take me down.” Ilya was finishing the sentence already biting into his fried dough pastry with chocolate hazelnut spread, peanut butter and Reese’s Pieces. Shane didn’t even try to hide his disgust.

“What is this order, are you five?”

“No, I just need a lot of energy, planning on burning it all today.” Ilya said with a suggestive grin and his eyebrows going cartoonishly up and down.

“Hold your horses cowboy, we still have things to do.” Shane skated ahead but Ilya did catch his soft smile and a bit of a blush on his cheeks. Could be the frost, but Ilya preferred to think it wasn’t.

They got to their final destination where they would need to get off the ice and walk the rest of the way to the parliament building, so they changed into their boots and went ahead with their ice skates hanging over their shoulders. It was already getting dark outside and Christmas illumination looked magical, especially the closer they got to the parliament.

They found the spot in the crowd and waited for the show to start. In his periphery Ilya noticed some people kept looking at them, some were even obviously taking pictures. Shane had also probably noticed. Ilya was ready to say that they could go and turned to Shane to say so, to be kissed by him instead. It was a sweet innocent kiss, Shane didn’t say anything, just smiled at Ilya and took his hand in his.

The light show was lackluster to be honest but Ilya didn’t care. He was hugging Shane from behind, Last Christmas was blasting on the speakers and both of them were swaying together to the rhythm. At some point Shane turned his head a little to be able to see Ilya and just looked at him smiling softly. Then when Ilya was already drowning in those bambi shiny eyes Shane shortened the distance between their faces and kissed Ilya with feeling. Ilya wasn’t usually the one to get flustered easily but he felt his whole body flashed with blush. Shane didn’t seem to notice that he had reduced his husband to an incoherent goo and turned in Ilya’s arms to be hugging him even tighter, all that while still kissing. Oh those photos will definitely end up on the internet but Shane made it clear he didn’t care. Shane was more eager than usual today and Ilya definitely wasn’t complaining.

Shortly after they called the cab to the parking lot, got in their car and in the blink of an eye were home.

Anya was overly excited to see them both and even more so when her bowl got full with food. Ilya and Shane changed into pajama pants but still were rocking their ugly sweaters from the market. Ilya made them take a selfie next to the Christmas tree to send to their family chat together with earlier photos from today. Yuna and David said they missed the snow and sent their photos from sunny Thailand in response. They loved the Christmas tree Ilya and Shane got and laughed at the sweaters and embarrassed Shane.

While everything that had to be cooked was roasting in the oven they set the table with the beautiful christmas tablecloth, courtesy of Yuna, she gifted them all of the essential household textiles for all seasons on their wedding day saying this way *their* house would look like a true family home and not a frat boys hangout. There were matching napkins, placemats and a table runner (Ilya swore that no matter how long he lived abroad there still would be a million of new words to learn, what do you mean a table *runner*?! Who's running where and why?!). The drinks and the charcuterie board were on the table alongside some Christmas decorations and candles, the festive music was blasting from the TV, the mood was serene, that was absolute domestic bliss. Maybe Shane was right, hanging out with the family was amazing but they definitely had to do something like this with only the two of them.

At some point after finishing setting the table and still waiting for the food to prepare they started slow dancing in the living room smiling at each other like the lovesick fools they were.

"You have some moves on you, Hollander."

"You are not so bad yourself, Rozanov."

"We should show off these moves in clubs more."

"Mm, maybe."

"Mmm, nice."

"Maybe even sooner than you think."

"Oh, do you have something in mind?"

"Maybe. You'll find out soon."

"A tease. I'm intrigued."

They swayed some more, smooching all the while, and then the oven beeped that everything was ready and they got to laying the dishes on the table.

They drank wine, chatted about nothing, laughed, ate a lot, the coziness of the holiday and the ease they always had with each other enveloped them till late in the evening.

A few hours later they found themselves panting and grunting on the couch but not for the usual reason.

“I’m so full my belly will burst any second.” Shane was slouching because he couldn’t physically sit up straight.

“Yeah, and you didn’t even touch the cake. Imagine how bad I feel!” Ilya was sitting in the same manner next to Shane. It’s funny how they were almost the same height, Ilya was 180 centimeters and Shane was like only a couple centimeters shorter, but when they were sitting Shane looked tiny in comparison. Ilya would lie if he said he didn’t like to feel big and strong next to Shane. Especially in bed. He would usually get horny at thoughts like that but not now, he would actually puke if he moved even a muscle.

“No one forced you to! How are you even alive after eating so much is beyond me! And why am I always eager to overindulge around you as well.”

“Yeah, well, no more indulging for today for sure, I was obviously overly ambitious, ‘cause we are definitely not having sex tonight."

Shane snorted at that and barely stopped the burp that was about to come out.

“Hell no for sure, I’m in a food coma.”

They sat for a while not moving at all but their thumbs drawing circles on their joint hands. There was some Christmas concert playing in the background on TV and they were watching it for a bit, not really paying any real attention, just spacing out. Eventually Shane moved a little.

“I have a present for you.” Shane’s head was resting on the couch back cushion and he turned to look at Ilya, smiled and stood up with a grunt, then headed somewhere to the back of the house where he probably was hiding the gift for Ilya.

Ilya sat straight and was excitedly waiting for Shane to return. He came back with a decorated rectangular box in his hands. He sat down next to Ilya on the couch and handed him the present with a timid smile.

“What's this?” Ilya wasn’t wasting any time and started tearing the wrapping paper. “I'm intrigued.” An expensive-looking ebony-coloured box had emerged from the layer of ripped paper. Ilya opened it to find what clearly was a photo album. There was no title on the cover. “Is it like those inappropriate lingerie photo shoots?” He turned to look at Shane with clear excitement in his voice. He’d seen those on the internet, they usually were done by the ladies and the husbands’ reactions were always funny.

“What?” Shane was obviously genuinely surprised by the guess. Oh well, you can’t win in life every time. Ilya tried not to show his disappointment. “Wait, is it something that you'd have liked?!”

“Hm, if the photographer is a lesbian and I get to fuck you in the lingerie after - hell yeah!” Ilya’s smile was hungry now.

“Okay, well, now I know what the next year's present is going to be.” Shane was blushing. Cute.

Ilya couldn’t deal with the anticipation any longer and opened the photo album to the first page. And was smacked right in the gut by what he saw. The mood shifted in an instant. So that's why Shane was so affectionate all day. “How-?”

“Svetlana.”

“Right.” Ilya was speechless. He gently traced the photo in front of him with his thumb. His mom's soft gaze was looking back at him from an old photograph. Ilya knew that originally it was black and white, it was taken in his mom’s first year of university, but this one was retouched to be in colour and with no blemishes. He turned to the next page, and then the next, and the next. Tears were streaming down Ilya’s face. All of the pages were filled with pictures of his mom from different periods of her life, all neat and newly printed. Some he had seen before, some were new to him and he couldn’t even imagine where and how anyone would find those. At the back of his mind he did register that Shane was soothingly patting his knee, but he couldn’t take his eyes off the photos. A few pages in he made an audible gasp and couldn’t take it anymore. He carefully laid the album aside on the couch and turned to Shane to engulf him in a crushing embrace. Shane hugged him back as fiercely and started whispering sweet things in Russian to him and rocking them both back and forth. Ilya was practically sobbing. What undid him was a photo of his mom standing on an embankment in Anapa holding a six-year-old Ilya’s hand.

New Year’s Eve 31 December 2021

“We’ll be there in 15 minutes give or take.” Shane was talking to Yuna on the speakerphone in the car.

“See you soon boys! And Anya!” The dog didn’t even perk up sleeping in the backseat. Yuna sounded extremely excited ending the phone call. Ilya had a suspicion that something was going on again. He looked at Shane with his eyes narrowed.

“So another surprise?" Ilya squeezed Shane’s hand that was resting at its rightful place on Ilya’s thigh.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” But Shane couldn’t control his facial expressions even if his life depended on it.

“You are a really bad liar.” Shane squeezed Ilya’s hand at that and kept looking at the road, smiling.

“We’ll get to the parents’ place in 10 minutes, you’ll see for yourself.” Ilya noticed how lately both he and Shane stopped referring to Yuna and David as *Shane’s* parents rather as

their parents, it warmed Ilya's heart in more ways than he could put into words really. He gave up on trying to pry anything from Shane and looked out of the window.

The whole Christmas Day and and most of the Boxing Day went in a blur, Ilya was an emotional mess, he spent them flipping through the photos sharing stories of his mom while laying in Shane's arms. Shane was so worried that even allowed Anya in the bedroom and Ilya to take the food to bed and wasn't even commenting when Ilya ate the whole leftover cake in one go while they were watching some Christmas romcom on TV.

Shane also had the audacity to try to *apologise* that he had ruined their holiday with his gift but Ilya shut him up with a heated kiss, reassuring him that it was the best present he could have ever gotten. He told Shane what Galina had said to him about needing to "disinfect the wound" before it could heal. And that now he really understood what it meant - seeing his mom's face after so much time was gut-wrenching, but at the same time it was like something dislocated clicked into its place in Ilya's chest and he could finally breathe. So he was thanking Shane all day and whispered "I love you"s into his skin while they were making love. That night he didn't dream about his *dead* mom, he dreamt about all of the fun times they had together while she was alive.

Ilya's present seemed lame in comparison - a one week summer holiday package for the two of them to Mykonos, Greece. He would step his gift-giving game up next year.

And then on 27th they had a game in Washington, which they won and on 29th they had a game, thankfully on their home ice that time, against Boston. They had a game in Boston earlier that season, in November, and it was apparent that hockey fans could bear a grudge for a very long time - Bostonians still hated Ilya with the passion. Ottawa wasn't going to have a game in Montreal until March, but Ilya doubted that the city would warm up to Shane in the meanwhile either.

They pulled up at Yuna and David's place but parked outside the garage. Hmmm. Was someone visiting so the garage was full? Shane was just smiling and gesturing Ilya to take the dog and the presents from the backseat while he was taking the groceries they had picked up on their way from the trunk.

The second Ilya stepped on the porch the door opened and he was welcomed with warm hugs and kisses from *his family* and rushed into the house. He gave a quick look around, noticing that the table in the dining room, from what he could see from the hall, looked like it was clearly already set and the food was ready, which was odd, usually he and David did the cooking together, but something else was off. Ilya couldn't really put his finger on it and only when he saw who the mystery guest was it clicked that the music from the speakers was in Russian.

"С Новым Годом, Ильюша!" *(Happy New Year, Ilyusha!)* Svetlana had a champagne glass in her hand and was smiling at Ilya from Yuna and David's living room. Ilya dropped the bags, stepped out of his shoes and without even taking his jacket off almost ran to his best friend he hadn't seen in person for so long.

"Света!" *(Sveta!)* He hugged her, lifting her up and spinning them around while both of them were laughing in delight. "Что ты здесь делаешь?" *(What are you doing here?)* He said

putting her down and smiling widely.

“И я тоже рада тебя видеть.” *(And I’m happy to see you too.)* Answered Svetlana smiling as well. She kissed Ilya on the cheek, gulped the leftover champagne from her glass and turned to everyone who was still standing in the hall looking at the both of them with a smile.

“Well I guess the surprise is a success!" Said Svetlana in English so that everyone could understand.

“Yes it definitely is, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves, we still have the dinner to finish!” Said Yuna enthusiastically. “Come on boys, hang your coats and come to the dining room!” She, David and Svetlana all disappeared into the kitchen taking some dishes with them to the dining room. It warmed Ilya’s heart to see Sveta talking with his parents like that. Ilya turned to look at Shane who still was standing in the hall in his coat, the bags abandoned on the floor, smiling softly back at Ilya. Ilya crossed the distance between them in a few broad strides, took Shane’s face in both of his hands and kissed him with fervor.

“I can’t believe you.” Ilya put his forehead to Shane’s.

“I wanted you to spend our first New Year as a married couple surrounded by your whole family.” Ilya didn’t think he could love Shane more than at this moment. But something was telling him that the both of them would find a way to fall even more in love throughout the years ahead.

“I love you.”

“Love you too. And that's not all,” Shane smiled conspiratorially, “let’s go.”

Stepping into the dining room Ilya understood what all the fuss was about. The table was laden with Russian traditional New Year’s dishes - Olivier salad, crab sticks salad, Herring Under a Fur Coat, red caviar, sprats and pickles sandwiches, cured meats, pickled vegetables, mandarins and even a bowl of Russian candies.

“What the-” Ilya looked at the sight before him with eyes like saucers.

Yuna came closer to Ilya and put her arm around him “We wanted to give you a home away from home sweetheart.” And pecked him on the cheek.

“You are my home guys.” He turned and engulfed Yuna in a full on hug, his eyes stung with unshed tears.

“Aw honey, now, now, let’s sit down and eat while the food is still hot.”

The chitter-chatter quickly washed over the table, everyone was passing each other the plates with the salads and complementing David’s cooking, the Russian music was still playing in the background, once in a while Shane would excitedly point out that he knew the song that was playing and even start describing to his parents what it was saying and whether it was from a film or not. Svetlana and Ilya would smile at that each time.

“So how did this whole thing happen?” Ilya said mid bite of a ham roll up.

“Well,” started Svetlana, “believe it or not the plan was set in motion during your wedding day.” She was looking straight at Shane with an incredulous look on her face. Ilya snickered, oh he could believe alright that Shane would think about Christmas presents in summer. “It started with the photo album and then extended into this slavic core get together.”

“Well it was ambitious,” started Shane, “I didn’t know if it was even possible at all, I was thinking about it even before the wedding, but everything was kinda hectic at the time.” Ilya reached his hand to brush Shane’s freckles-dotted cheek softly and reassuringly with his thumb. Shane continued, now looking at Ilya, “and well me and Sveta exchanged numbers at the wedding and I asked about any photos that maybe were left back in Russia and she said that she would try to see what she could do and so we were chatting back and forth trying to do everything on time.” The more affectionate *Sveta* used by Shane instead of formal *Svetlana* didn't escape Ilya’s attention. He was over the moon, his two most important people in his life were getting along. That was a present in and of itself.

“Yeah, and it wasn’t easy, Alexei was an asshole, as per usual.” huffed Svetlana.

“Let’s focus on positive things!” Yuna interrupted cheerfully, she stood up and clapped her hand excitedly. “We also have a present prepared!” She came up to a cupboard and took out a box similar to one Ilya had received from Shane on Christmas. “Here you are, darling!” She handed the present to Ilya. “Open it up!”

The album Shane had gifted Ilya was a loose leaf one, and in the box there were more pages that he could put in it. The pages weren’t blank as well, there were old photos of Hollanders, Ilya was flipping the pages with curiosity and awe. He had seen some of these in David and Yuna’s cottage, but now he also was part of the family and he got to have those as well. He stopped at the photo of six-year-old Shane with a blinding smile standing in ice skates on the ice holding a stick.

“You can put these in the album and then it’s up to you both to keep filling it with new family memories.” Yuna was saying that with tremble in her voice so Ilya stood up and hugged her, thanking for everything. At that everyone started exchanging gifts, the stand out was a very expensive and exclusive vodka bottle for David from Svetlana.

“I like you a lot, you are very welcome to our house any time!” David said to that and everyone laughed, eventually turning back to their food.

Some time later when everyone was beyond full they started cleaning up the table and Ilya and Svetlana were sent into the living room to put The Irony of Fate on TV. Both of them were shocked to find out that literally a few days ago Mosfilm officially had uploaded the whole thing with English subtitles on YouTube. That was fate indeed.

They were sitting on the couch now waiting for everyone to finish in the kitchen and join them.

“Илюшь, я очень рада за тебя! Парень просто по уши в тебя влюблён. Смотря на вас прям начинаешь верить в любовь. И завидовать.” *(Ilyush, I am very happy for you! The guy is head over heels in love with you. Looking at you two, one starts believing in love. And being jealous.)* Said Svetlana in Russian.

“Что, тоже хочешь себя скучного канадца коротышку?” *(What, do you also want a boring Canadian shorty?)* Replied Ilya in Russian as well.

“Hey!” shouted Shane from the kitchen, “I heard that!” He came out from the kitchen into the living room with a towel in his hands looking affrontedly at Ilya. “And understood! I'm not short, you asshole!” Ilya flipped him off. Shane mirrored the gesture. Both were smiling like fools. Shane went back to finish doing the dishes.

Svetlana laughed at their antics and continued in Russian “No, you and I have very different taste in guys, I would probably prefer some hot Latin American. But seriously, the whole family is besotted with you, and the last time I saw you so happy apart from your wedding day was probably when Aunt Ira was still alive. She would be very happy for you. You've finally found the family you've always been worthy of.” She hugged his arm and put her head on his shoulder.

“Sometimes I don't believe that it's all true,” Ilya breathed out loudly, “I'm afraid that one day I'll wake up in my empty condo in Moscow and this whole thing will turn out to be a dream.”

“It's all very real, Ilya, I know it’s hard to believe after everything you went through. Both of you have been through a lot together as well. But you have figured it all out. I’m so proud of you! You deserve every ounce of this happiness you have now. Plus, no offense, but I doubt you have the imagination to dream all of this craziness up.”

They laughed both at that and were joined by everyone else in the living room. The film was great, they had a whale of a time talking into late in the evening. They turned on CBC's New Year’s countdown while Svetlana was describing Russian tradition of writing down your wish on a piece of paper to then burn it and let the ash fall into your champagne glass to then drink it all up at midnight. Ilya wrote “to keep being this happy”.

That night, staying at his family’s place, with all of the people he loved under one roof, he dreamed of his mom finally coming up to him and Shane and hugging them both.

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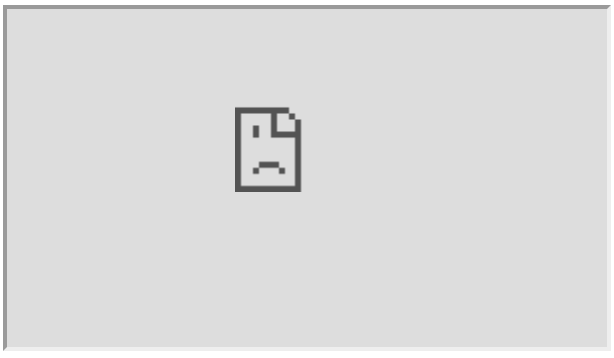

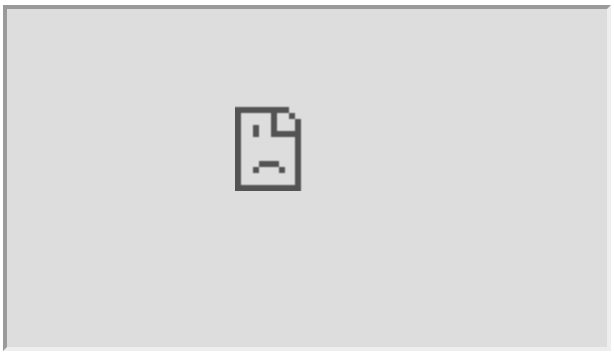

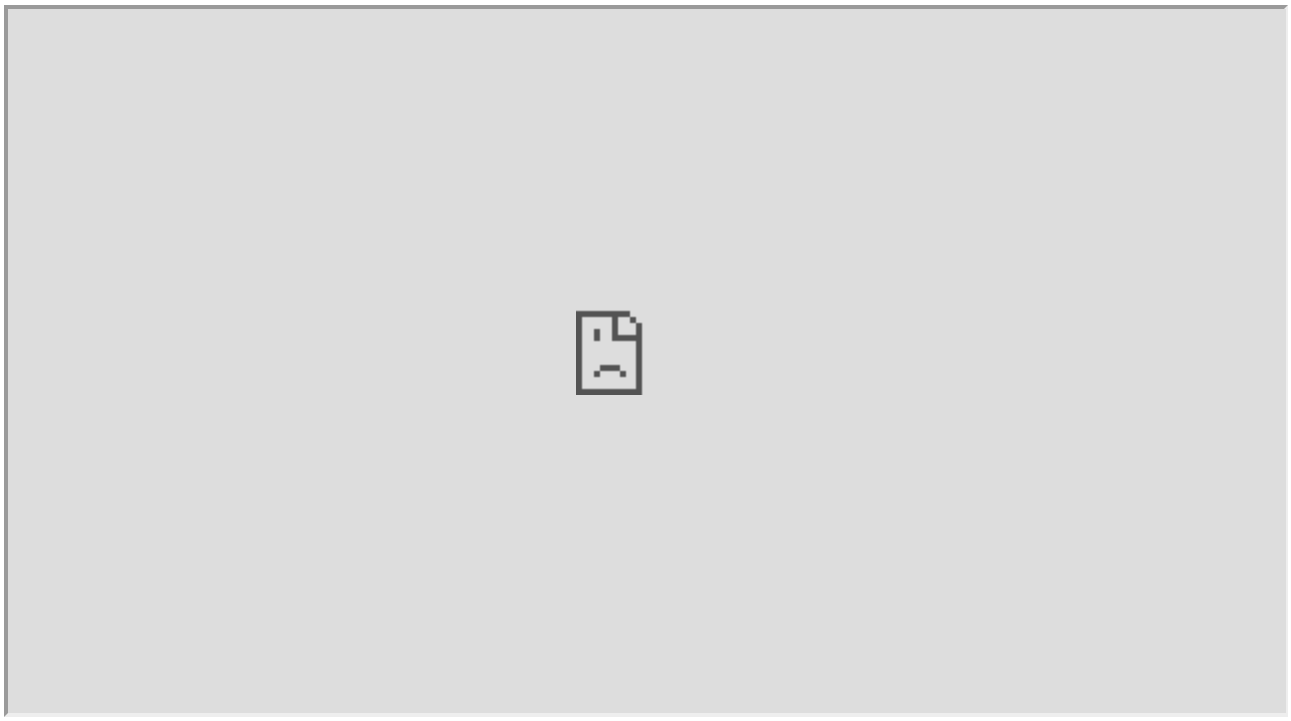

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End Notes

Today was the last day of public winter's holidays in Russia and I thought it was a great way to end this magical time by spending it with domestic Shane and Ilya. The last episode of the show came out right on my birthday and I couldn't get the story out of my head ever since so I had to put my feelings into writing. Hope you liked it ❤️ And hope you had a great "Heated" holiday season! 😄

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!